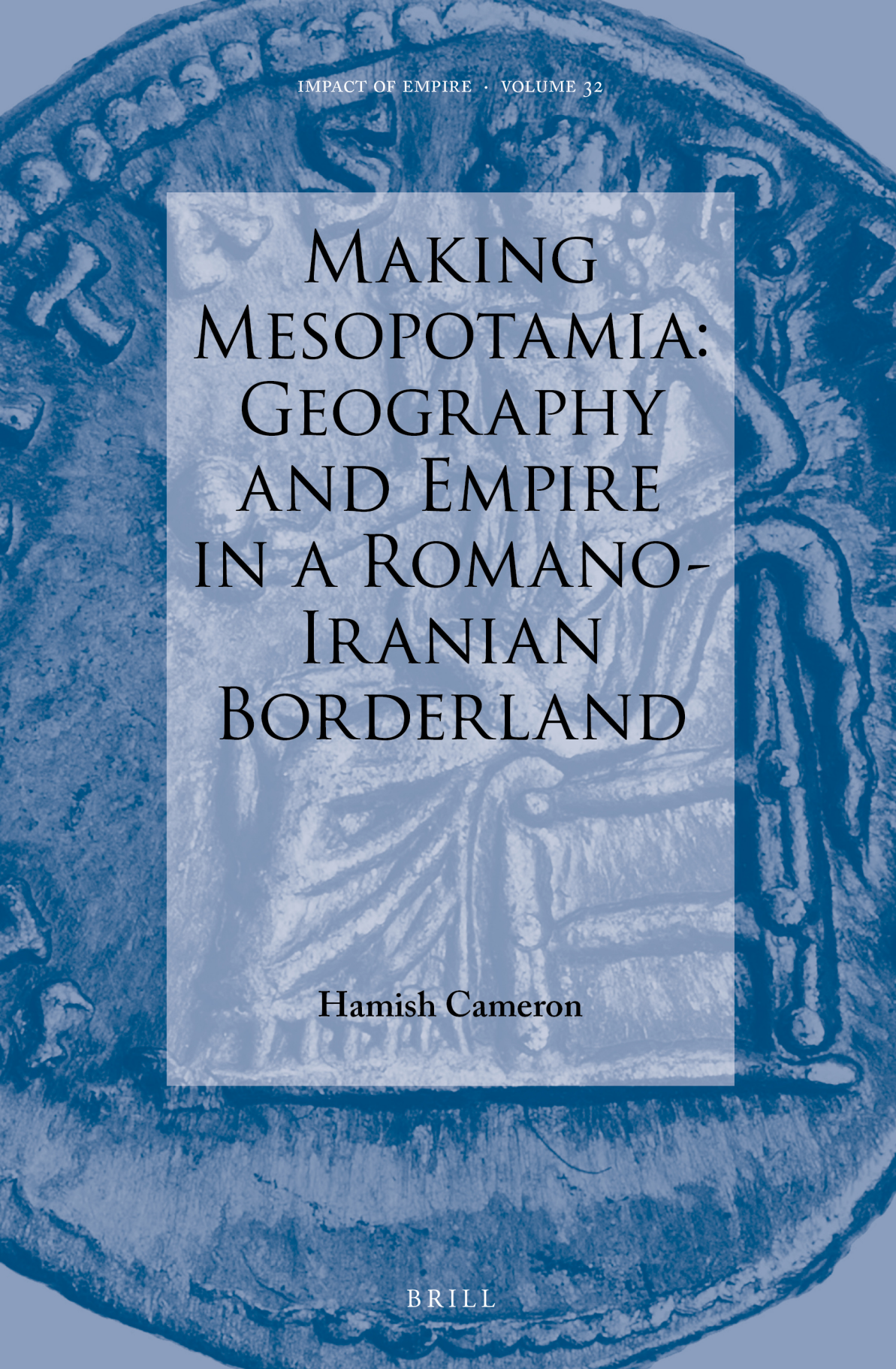




IMPACT OF EMPIRE · VOLUME 32

MAKING
MESOPOTAMIA:
GEOGRAPHY
AND EMPIRE
IN A ROMANO-
IRANIAN
BORDERLAND

Hamish Cameron

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Making Mesopotamia: Geography and Empire in a Romano-Iranian Borderland

Impact of Empire

ROMAN EMPIRE, C. 200 B.C.—A.D. 476

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Making Mesopotamia: Geography and Empire in a Romano-Iranian Borderland

By

Hamish Cameron



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To Margaret, Jack, Max, Horace and Jean, iucundissimi maiores



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A Note on the Maps

This book contains a number of maps which I constructed to aid the reader in their comprehension of my arguments. While visualisations of the spatial relationships help us think about the spaces we examine, it is important to remember that just like geographical writing, cartography presents an image which the creator designs, and in this case, a level of geographic accuracy that was not available to the geographers under examination.¹ I constructed the maps using the ArcGIS 10 package with basemaps obtained through ArcGIS Online.² The maps vary in scale, but are consistent in map projection (GCS WGS 1984) throughout for ease of comparison between maps in the document.³

The point data for the ancient sites was gathered from a variety of online sources including the Pleiades Project.⁴ The Pleiades Project takes a cautious approach, often giving estimated areas for sites where any doubt exists, and sometimes even for well-known sites. All coordinates were checked against published maps, usually those of Sartre, Millar, Edwell or the Barrington Atlas as well as close range examination using online mapping services.⁵ The resolution of publicly accessible satellite imagery is usually sufficiently detailed to make out ancient ruins and compare them to published site plans. In general, I am confident in the placement of the sites I locate; where doubt remains, I indicate so in the text.

By and large, the geophysical terrain features of the ancient landscape remain today. However, the main problem with constructing ancient maps using modern terrain data is the issue of water levels. For inland parts of modern Turkey, Syria and Iraq, this problem arises from the numerous dams which have been built on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Several modern hydro-electric and irrigation schemes have produced large lakes on the Euphrates. Accordingly, the modern boundaries and courses of the water bodies shown on these maps may not correspond to the ancient boundaries and courses of those bodies.

1 Smith (2005) 832.

2 Maps throughout this book using ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® and ArcMap™ are the intellectual property of Esri and are used herein under license. Copyright © Esri. All rights reserved. For more information about Esri® software, please visit www.esri.com.

3 GCS WGS 1984 is a convenient standard (and is used by the GPS system): <http://blogs.esri.com/esri/arcgis/2008/07/18/gcs-wgs84-why-should-you-care-about-it/>.

4 Bagnall et al. (2006); Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, Anon (n.d.).

5 Millar (1993); Talbert and Bagnall (2000); Sartre (2005); Edwell (2008).

Introducing the Borderland

The Mesopotamian Borderland witnessed the victory of Republican and Parthian generals, the glory of Roman emperors and Iranian kings, the hopes of independence and empire, and the blood and tears of defeat. For the four centuries after the arrival of the Roman legions of Lucullus and Pompey, it was one of the most important stages for imperial interaction in the Roman world, the stage on which imperial power was compelled to be manifest by the ever-present threat of the Persian “other”. This landscape is filled with places that resonate in the history of the Roman Empire: Carrhae,¹ Palmyra,² Nisibis and Amida,³ Dura Europus,⁴ and Hatra.⁵ Even as portions of the Mesopotamia Borderland have become unreachable due to war or destruction, images of this space are readily available to us in the twenty-first century. We can search the internet for contemporary photographs and video, browse historical photographs, sketches and paintings, and zoom increasingly deeply into publicly available high-resolution satellite imagery. But how did the Romans imagine the Mesopotamian Borderland? How did they represent the physical reality of this geopolitical space in words? What did they choose to describe, to emphasise, to suggest, to omit? How did they construct their narratives to best explain, justify, rationalise or ignore this edge of Roman power? How did they make “Mesopotamia”?

These are the questions this book seeks to answer. To do so, I must construct a foundation for my own narrative; that is the task of this introductory chapter. I begin with the Mesopotamian Borderland. What is a borderland? What is *this* borderland? Why are those questions important? To answer the latter, I address the historical context of the first four centuries CE from the perspective of the borderland, beginning with two of its most important kingdoms. The

-
- 1 “Where Crassus was killed, seized treacherously by Suren the Parthian general”, Strabo 16.1.23. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
 - 2 “A private lot between the two great empires of Rome and Parthia, and at the first sign of discord between them, always a concern to both”, Pliny *NH* 5.88.
 - 3 Who “receive sellers from Persia into the whole Roman Empire and send back buyers” and, ironically, whose “famous walls, always destroy the courage of the Persians in war”, *Expositio* 22.
 - 4 “A deserted city”, Amm. Marc. 23.5.8; 24.1.5.
 - 5 “An old town situated in the middle of a desert, and long since abandoned”, Amm. Marc. 25.8.5.

lens of Commagene shows the arrival of Rome and the turbulent transition from contested borderland space to imperial territory that characterised the first hundred years of the Roman Near East. The lens of Osroene shows how a borderland dynasty could navigate a tenuous independence by astute judgement of political pressures. The third century solidified the Mesopotamian Borderland as a stage of imperial action, where the power of emperors and kings was displayed, reinforced and destroyed. Next, I move to the people who described the borderland, the Roman imperial geographical writers and their works, in particular Strabo's *Geography*, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, Claudius Ptolemy's *Manual of Geography*, Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae*, and the anonymous *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*. Finally, having constructed my methodological, geographical, historical and philological foundation, I will describe the outline of the narrative I will construct.

1 What is a Borderland?

In the early twenty-first century, borders are often conceived of as physically and legally fixed lines of demarcation. The ubiquity of geographic representations and information available in the modern world, particularly through the internet, has reinforced the idea that space is rigidly delimited by separating and containing boundaries. Even in areas where borders are disputed, the existence of a border is seldom in dispute, rather the object of contention is where the border is to be drawn and by whom. This mental framework is often problematic and its application to historical situations can be misleading.⁶

There is recognition among geographers and cartographers that maps with clearly defined border lines give a false impression of uniform territorial control.⁷ Cartographic representations lend themselves to the practice of using lines to divide space to a greater degree than narrative geographic texts, but in the world they claim to represent, borders and boundaries are fluid and contingent. Pre-modern cartographic representations, in particular, may give spurious authority to the lines and boundaries whose reality they assert. This was often intentional. State ideological texts usually show the state they represent as a stable construct in which state power is evenly and ubiquitously distributed.⁸ Geographical texts often participate in this construction.⁹ The

⁶ Elton (1996) 3.

⁷ See the extensive bibliography in Smith (2005) 832–34.

⁸ Smith (2007) 32.

⁹ Nicolet (1991); Clarke (1999).

idea that lines could be drawn around Roman territory was certainly current in the Augustan era, even though such lines were not regarded as a limit to expansion. In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus boasts to have increased the *fines* (boundaries) of all the provinces.¹⁰ Strabo frequently refers to the ὅρια (boundaries) of cities, provinces and empires in his work, including his notification of the border of the Parthian Empire (τῆς Παρθυαίων ἀρχῆς) along the Euphrates. Strabo usually locates these boundaries in specific places or on geographical features (such as the Euphrates) rather than attempt a comprehensive description of the outlines of a space as we find in Ptolemy's work.¹¹

Social anthropologist Fredrik Barth is concerned with the many ways in which boundaries can manifest. Barth defines a boundary as a conceptual construct impressed on the world to divide physical, social or cognitive spaces;¹² however, despite the cognitive imagery of boundaries as barriers, dividers and stopping points, boundaries do not merely separate and contain. As Barth notes, "impressing boundaries on the world creates affordances as well as limitations".¹³ In any sphere, some human activities will attempt to circumvent imposed boundaries. The great natural rivers to the north and east of the Roman Empire make convenient conceptual borders, but their cartographic convenience obscures a porous reality. Lee has argued persuasively that the idea of an armed *limes* forming an impenetrable wall surrounding the Empire is anachronistic.¹⁴ Lee marshals a significant body of evidence showing the movement of people and ideas back and forth across the Roman Empire's northern and eastern frontiers. Yet, while boundaries are porous, they are still boundaries. Some actors may be limited by a boundary, while others will be afforded an opportunity.¹⁵ As we shall see, both kinds of actor are evident in the Roman geographical sources.

Another important assertion of Barth's work is that boundaries are often analytical concepts imposed by outsiders. Maps of the Roman Empire commonly show a discretely bordered empire comprising a ring of polygonal spaces surrounding the Mediterranean. This gives the artificial impression of neatness and order, but the precision of that order is imposed by scholars for analytical purposes. The Roman imperial geographic writers also imposed their own

10 *Res Gestae* 26: "Omnium provinciarum populi Romani, quibus finitimae fuerunt gentes quae non parerent imperio nostro, fines auxi." (I increased the boundaries of all the provinces of the Roman people which were adjacent to peoples not subject to our empire.).

11 These boundaries are the subject of Chapter 3.

12 Barth (2000) 17–20.

13 Barth (2000) 27.

14 Lee (1993).

15 Barth (2000) 27–30.

boundaries for their own particular purposes. Defining these boundaries is a major goal of the first section of this project. Defining the purposes for which they were assigned is a major goal of the second section.

Borderland studies began as a method to examine the history of colonisation and expansion in North America in a way that articulated the disparate experiences of the people on the edges of the colonial powers.¹⁶ It drew from work on frontiers, middle grounds, and boundaries, all messy spaces where social and cultural identities become engaged and entangled.¹⁷ A borderland is a place of multiple overlapping and often contested boundaries, of intercultural negotiation and accommodation, of autonomy, agency and opportunity, of the exploitation of differential conditions, of movement across boundaries, and of subversion of dominant power structures. As such, borderlands are also spaces for resistance and critique of colonial systems. Like the boundaries they attempt to describe, borderlands are culturally and historically contingent.¹⁸

As part of his study of the northern frontier regions of the Assyrian Empire, Bradley Parker translates the historical definitions constructed in the context of North American history into a general model for considering the types of borders present in an ancient borderland. In his 2006 article “Toward an Understanding of Borderland Processes”, Parker defines the terms boundary, border, frontier and borderland.¹⁹ A boundary is “that which serves to indicate the bounds or limits of anything”.²⁰ Borders and frontiers are types of boundary, the former being a spatially fixed dividing line and the latter a zone of overlapping boundaries. In this formulation, a borderland is a geographic space around or between political or cultural entities where circumstances or processes arising from the interaction of boundaries create borders or frontiers. Parker’s work on borderlands builds upon Hugh Elton’s study of the Roman frontiers.²¹ Elton stresses the necessity of considering the Roman frontiers as

16 Adelman and Aron (1999a); Haefeli (1999); Wunder and Hämäläinen (1999); Adelman and Aron (1999b).

17 For example: Lamar and Thompson (1981); Sahlins (1989); White (1991); Wilson and Donnan (1998); Barth (2000); Brooks (2002); Hämäläinen (2008); Ramos (2008).

18 Lefebvre (1991); Soja (1996); Harvey (2006). A borderlands approach to the Roman Near East bears some similarity to that of New Institutional Economics, but with the primary lens being spatial rather than institutional: Seland (2014a); Seland (2014b); Seland (2015a).

19 First described in B.J. Parker (2002) and fully elaborated in B.J. Parker (2006).

20 Parker, (2006) 79, accepts the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition.

21 Elton (1996). Freeman (1996) gives a brief summary of the origins of the field of Roman Frontier Studies in the nineteenth century and its voluminous scholarship fuelled by the large number of archaeological sites from the edges of the Roman Empire (especially in Britain and Germany), as well as the considerable non-academic interest in such matters. A few other important (and often contentious) works on Roman frontiers include:

overlapping series of zones. The two factors at play here are crucial: 1) that the frontier be considered as a zone, not a line; 2) that it be considered as a number of overlapping zones, rather than a single zone. Elton's work emerged from the field of Roman frontier studies and was concerned primarily with military spaces and the interaction of soldiers and locals within those spaces. Parker's development of Elton's concept of overlapping zones explicitly reduces the military aspect of the frontier to one of several sub-types. Each of the boundaries that interact to create a given borderland can be categorised according to its type (geographic, political, demographic, cultural, economic) and strength (static and restrictive versus porous and fluid).²² I do not seek to apply Parker's typology to imperial Roman geographical texts, but his technique of categorising boundaries by type and strength provides a useful analytical tool for considering the ancient world.

Examining the circumstances and processes that contribute to these categories, and the interactions between boundaries of different types through time, is an important method for thinking about and characterising the processes which take place in a given borderland.²³ A handful of studies have examined these processes in the context of the Mesopotamian Borderland. Lee examines the role of information flow across frontiers – both current information of immediate relevance to decision-making and general background knowledge about distant people and places.²⁴ Most importantly for my project, Lee shows that frontiers did not pose a barrier to movement, contrary to some previous scholarship. While Lee discusses the flow of information across boundaries, Graham analyses the flow of information from the frontiers in order to explore how that information altered Roman frontier ideology.²⁵ Moatti describes the increasing desire in the late empire to regulate the movement and activities of foreign merchants and certain other classes of travellers.²⁶ In particular, she looks at the role of the treaties between the Sasanid and Roman Empires in limiting trade to particular Mesopotamian cities, most famously Nisibis.²⁷ These empire-wide developments were reflective of a growing Roman awareness

Luttwak (1984); Isaac (1990); Whittaker (1994); Mattern (1999); Whittaker (2004); Hekster and Kaizer (2011); Hoyos (2013).

22 B.J. Parker (2006) 82. The strength of a boundary is a continuum between those two end points. Military aspects are a sub-type of the political set.

23 "Borderland processes can be defined as the dynamic interaction within and between boundary sets as their characteristics (i.e. static, restrictive, porous, fluid) and the nature of their interconnections vary through time." B.J. Parker (2006) 94.

24 Lee (1993).

25 Graham (2006).

26 Moatti (2011).

27 Moatti (2011) 13–17.

of their ability to legally define and regulate the limits of their empire.²⁸ The late imperial focus of these studies raises an important point of chronological change: there is no doubt that the nature and rigidity of the frontier changed from a broad, largely symbolic zone between the Parthians and the Republican dynasts to a more clearly demarcated and fortified border after Diocletian in particular. For this reason, many studies on the Roman Near East begin or conclude around the late third and early fourth centuries CE.²⁹

The work of two other scholars of Roman frontiers is particularly relevant when discussing a Roman frontier zone like the Mesopotamian Borderland. Isaac argues that Roman frontier policy was concerned with the use of the army for conquest, occupation and internal security, rather than for establishing a defensive perimeter.³⁰ Furthermore, he highlights the role of the provincial administration in fostering urbanisation, including, but not limited to, the foundation of veteran colonies. Whittaker examines the Roman ideology of the frontier and compares it to Roman frontier practice across the physical breadth and chronological depth of the Empire.³¹ He argues that at no point is there any sign that Roman ideology saw a fortified defensive system as marking the limit of their operational space on the eastern frontier. Both scholars point to a Roman frontier mentality of imperial aggression whereby non-Roman space was constantly available for penetration by Roman power at Roman discretion. However, by the fourth century, an awareness of the practical limits of Roman power had been absorbed into the rhetoric of empire, as an analysis of the geographical texts of the period will show.³²

Most scholarship on the Roman Near East has focused on the reality of Roman power at the edges of the empire, but few have considered the representation of those liminal spaces. In fact, the Roman Empire had no self-evident or “natural” borders dividing physical space into “Roman” and “non-Roman”. Boundaries between those spheres were conceptual and contested; Roman understanding of the limits of imperial power was articulated and constructed through discourse and narrative. In the east, the representation of the frontier region was particularly complex owing to the presence of two successive political entities capable of sustained opposition to Rome: the empires of the Arsacid Parthians and the Sasanid Persians.

28 Moatti (2011) 27–28.

29 For example: Millar (1993); Lee (1993); Sartre (2005); Graham (2006); Edwell (2008).

30 Isaac (1990).

31 Whittaker (1994); Whittaker (2004).

32 Graham (2006) 2; Drijvers (2011) 14; and Chapter 3.

From the beginning of Roman power in the Near East, the border between Roman and Iranian power was a major focus of imperial attention. This book investigates part of that border, northern Mesopotamia, and examines how it was represented by Roman geographical writers of the first four centuries CE. Geographical texts offer us rich and multi-layered descriptions of ancient spaces and are often consulted and judged as factual (or not) in pursuit of historical or topographical “reality”. However, as the work of Nicolet, Whittaker, Clarke and others has shown, Roman geographical writers considered and represented spaces in complex and ideologically contingent ways.³³ Geographical writing provides an understudied window into how Romans imagined frontiers, borders and borderlands, and the processes which formed and informed them: spaces under Roman imperial power, spaces inarguably beyond Roman power, and spaces in-between – borderland spaces.

2 Where is the Mesopotamian Borderland?

The geophysical area of Mesopotamia was bounded by the Taurus Mountains to the north, the Tigris River to the east, and the Euphrates River to the south and west. However, for the first two centuries of Roman control in the Near East, imperial power was focused on the coast of Syria while much of the interior regions were controlled indirectly by client kings.³⁴ The kingdom of Commagene in the Taurus foothills west of the Euphrates illustrates the political circumstances that existed for small kingdoms in the borderland between the Roman and Parthian Empires. South of Commagene, the pastoral tribes who moved around and between the urban centres of Cyrrhestice and Chalcidike were able to withdraw east of the Euphrates when threatened by Roman power.³⁵ Similarly, the city of Palmyra negotiated a political position between Roman and Parthia by virtue of their remote location and domination of the northern limits of the Arabian steppe though a lucrative network of desert trade routes between Syria and Babylon. These cities and peoples to the west of the Euphrates are best considered as part of the borderland in the first century CE. Thus, the Mesopotamian Borderland includes the territories that would eventually be encompassed by the Roman provinces of

33 Nicolet (1991); Whittaker (1994); Clarke (1999). For the Seleucid Empire, see Kosmin (2014).

34 For a discussion of the terminology of subordinate kingship in the Roman East, see Kaizer and Facella (2010). For Parthian interactions with their subordinate kings, see the final section of Wiesehöfer (1998).

35 Strabo 16.2.10.

Osrhoena and Mesopotamia as well as the adjacent regions of Commagene and Adiabene, whose histories were intertwined with the frontier in a fundamental way. These areas exhibit a considerable degree of geographical and cultural continuity.³⁶ This continuity makes “the Mesopotamian Borderland” a useful object of analysis.³⁷

As we shall see in Chapter 3, the name “Mesopotamia” is ambiguous. Referring to this space as the Mesopotamian Borderland opens it to more than just the physical area between the rivers and alleviates the ambiguity which surrounds the term “Mesopotamia” and its various uses throughout time, space and genre. Drawing the map of the borderland in this way highlights two further considerations. The first is the connective role of rivers. As we shall see in the geographical narratives of the Mesopotamian Borderland, rivers act more as conduits than barriers. Moreover, they often inextricably link conditions on either side of them. The history of Roman expansion into, and representation of, Osrhoene is enriched by considering it in parallel with Roman expansion into, and representation of, Commagene. The second is the role of mountains, not as geophysical features which restrict and limit movement, but as ecological features that encourage different cultural conditions.³⁸ Drawing a geographical boundary between “Mesopotamia” and “Armenia” is often a concern of the Roman geographical writers. Armenia was a major theatre of conflict for almost as long as the Roman Empire had territorial interests in Asia. Disputes in that region often heralded military action south of the Taurus. Nevertheless, quite different geographical and cultural conditions existed there.³⁹

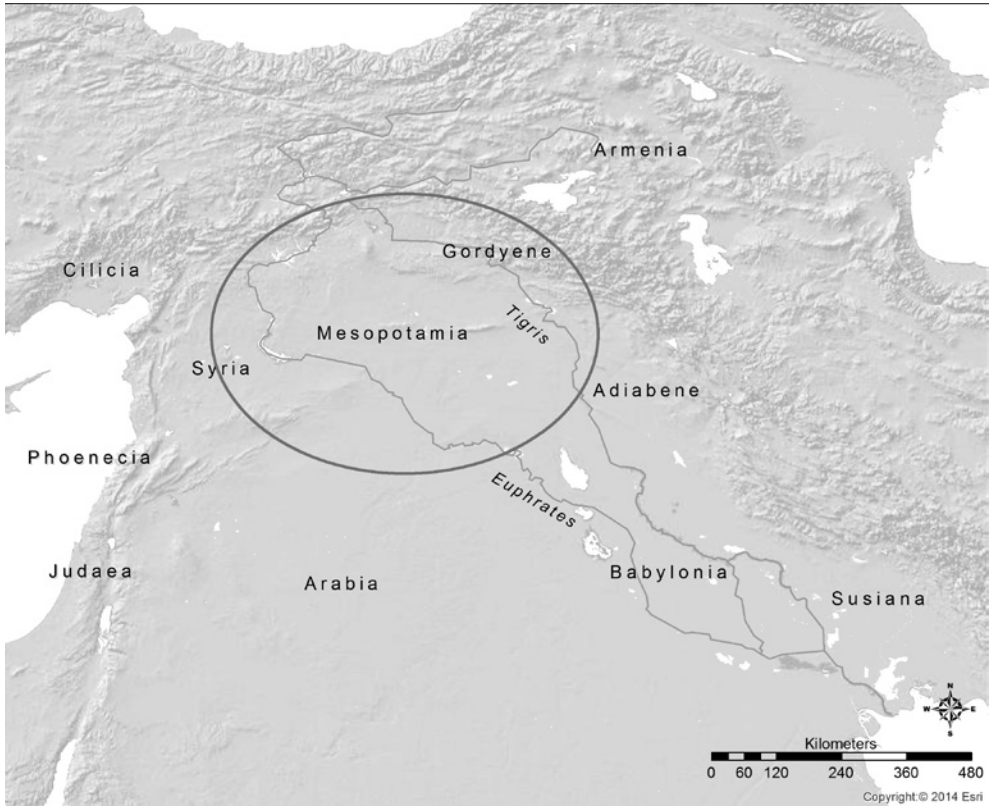
It should be remembered throughout that “the Mesopotamian Borderland” is my own analytical category placed over this geographical area and its textual representations. The purpose of this category is to help us better understand the texts in question and what they tell us about the cultural, political and ideological contexts of their production. In this, I am participating in an ancient tradition. Strabo includes the Mesopotamian Borderland within the land

36 This cultural continuity was an ancient perception, see Strabo 16.1.1, for example, where he describes Assyria as a unitary region. Philostratus (*VA* 1.16) refers to a local myth about Antioch on the Orontes as “Assyrian”; see also *VA* 1.19. For further examples in the literary realm, see Andrade (2014). For examples of artistic similarities between Hierapolis and Hatra, see A. Kropp (2013), and cultural similarities between Hatra and Palmyra, see Yon (2013).

37 This area corresponds closely to what Sommer calls Rome’s “orientalische Steppengrenze”, Sommer (2005).

38 Horden and Purcell (2000); Sahlins (1989).

39 For a persuasive argument that Armenia and Mesopotamia should be considered together, see de Jong (2013). However, his argument applies mainly when the object of analysis is Parthian culture.



MAP 1.1 The Mesopotamian Borderland

of the Assyrians and defines a geographical space of Mesopotamia between the two rivers. Pliny divides the Mesopotamian Borderland between Roman and Parthian space. Ptolemy divides the space between strictly defined geographical areas using the rivers as boundaries. The *Expositio Totius Mundi* and Ammianus Marcellinus refer to Roman administrative regions. From this brief survey, two things should be clear: 1) that the Roman imperial geographical writers delimited space as aggregated units according to different criteria in service of their own analytic criteria, and 2) that my category “Mesopotamian Borderland” does not conform precisely to the categories of any of the geographical writers under discussion. This does not mean that these geographical writers did not conceive of the space as a zone in which multiple boundaries and sets of boundaries overlapped and interacted in a variety of complex ways – that is, as a borderland. However, by self-consciously deploying a lens through which to examine these texts, we can compare how each imagined the same space, regardless of how they variously delimited and denominated it.

A few words about the physical geography and ecology of the space will help contextualise the geographical narratives to come. Northern Mesopotamia can be divided into three broad zones: a fertile shelf near the Taurus Mountains, a barren rocky desert plateau, and the river valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers and their tributaries. Dryland farming, dependent on natural rainfall, is possible on the fertile shelf.⁴⁰ Northern Mesopotamia had lower crop yields than southern Mesopotamia, but more land area.⁴¹ As one proceeds south, farming becomes increasingly marginal until the land gives way to desert where sparse grazing, wells and oases provide sustenance for goat and camel pastoralists. In the third millennium BCE, settlement in this area was concentrated in large, circular, walled settlements which dotted the land, but these were replaced by a dispersed settlement pattern by the first millennium.⁴² In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, most of the major cities of the region were in the northern zone, among the headwaters of the Balikh and Khabur Rivers. These rivers flow south into the Euphrates, offering easily irrigated strips of land for cultivation and convenient routes through the arid steppe. As will be seen, this environment played an important role in the dynamics of the borderland.

Mesopotamia as a whole was a very productive region. Herodotus considered it more so than the proverbially wealthy Egypt, even with the neighbouring regions included (Cyrene, Libya and Barca).⁴³ In Herodotus' list of Persian tax regions, the tax paid by the ninth district (sometimes called the Great Satrapy of Mesopotamia) exceeded all other satrapies in the Persian Empire: 1000 talents of silver and 500 boy eunuchs.⁴⁴ Herodotus' ninth district encompassed all of Mesopotamia from the Taurus to the Gulf of Arabia: the satrapies of *Bâbiruś*, *Ahurâ* and *Arabâya*.⁴⁵ In these aspects, northern Mesopotamia

40 Wilkinson et al. (1994) 484–85; Wilkinson (1995) 144–45; Wilkinson (2000) 222. For dryland farming in the hinterland of Palmyra, see Krzywinski and Krzywinski (2016).

41 Weiss (1986). Wilkinson (2000) 222: "The archaeological reconstruction of land-use patterns within several ecological zones of the Jazira provide support for this model of large-scale prairie-type agriculture, but with an added emphasis on differential levels of land-use intensity dependent upon location."

42 Wilkinson (1995) 139–59; Wilkinson (2000) 236, 239. The reasons for this change are unclear. The leading theories are Assyrian resettlement policies or the spontaneous movement of Aramaeans.

43 Hdt. 3.92.

44 Hdt. 3.92: "Ἀπὸ Βαβυλωνῶνος δὲ καὶ τῆς λοιπῆς Ἀσσυρίης χιλιά οἱ προσήιε τάλαντα ἀργυρίου καὶ παῖδες ἐκτομίαι πενταχόσιοι· νομὸς εἴνατος οὗτος" (From the Babylonians and the rest of Assyria, 1000 talents of silver and 500 castrated boys; being the ninth district.).

45 Namely, southern Mesopotamia as formerly ruled from Babylon, northern Mesopotamia as formerly controlled by Assyria, and the steppe regions of the middle Euphrates: DB

is overshadowed by a greater degree of ancient evidence and contemporary scholarly interest in activity taking place in neighbouring regions, namely the productivity of southern Mesopotamia/Babylonia. While the intensely irrigated southern region of Babylonia may have produced higher yields per unit of land area which allowed the growth of great cities like Babylon, Seleucia and Ctesiphon, northern Mesopotamia's broad areas of rain-fed plains may have out-produced the south.⁴⁶ Limits on the distance that farmers could transport their produce to markets and tax-collection centres meant that urban centres in the north had to be smaller and more dispersed than in southern Mesopotamia, but northern Mesopotamia was nevertheless able to support a number of large Bronze Age settlements.⁴⁷ Iron Age settlement of the region under the Assyrian Empire was further dispersed among a larger number of smaller settlements, but the structures of that empire developed to draw produce from a wider area in support of the imperial cities on the banks of the Tigris.⁴⁸ The dispersed wealth and productivity of the northern area may have been less visible than the concentrated surpluses of Babylonia to the south, but when northern Mesopotamia was politically united under an empire the capacity of that area would have been clear, at least to regional administrators.

col. 1, lines 14–15; DPe lines 10–11; DSe lines 25–26; DNa lines 26–27; DSAa; XPh lines 22 & 25; Briant (2002) 172–73; Herzfeld (1968) 292, 357–59. See Chapter 2.

46 Weiss (1986); Wilkinson et al. (2005) esp. 484–485. Strabo (16.1.14) describes the produce of Babylonia.

47 Wilkinson et al. (1994); Ur (2003) 112. For pre-Hellenistic settlement history, see Liverani (1988); Fales (1990); Kühne (1995); Wilkinson et al. (1994); Wilkinson (1995); Wilkinson (2000); Wilkinson et al. (2005). On commercial activities in the Bronze Age, Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996) who notes on p. 80: “There is no reason to disbelieve that once these [tax] quotas were achieved, the laborer was able to profit from his/her/their own private production. Everything produced beyond the quota could be freely disposed of in an open market of barter exchange. It is difficult to conceive of what other mechanism would have existed for satisfying the growing population's everyday needs.”

48 In the 14th century BCE, Assyrian control spread as far as the Euphrates and, through the subsequent centuries, coalesced due to the growth of agricultural colonisation, networks of communication and transports, and strongpoints for defence and tribute collection. Liverani (1988) esp. 90–92; Wilkinson et al. (2005) 37–44. Smaller Bronze Age sites would not have needed extensive inter-regional networks to supply their basic needs, but the larger size of Assyrian capitals would have required the use of long distance networks of up to 100km just to supply the agricultural needs of the urban population: Wilkinson et al. (2005) 36; Altaweel (2004). Furthermore, lower yields per area reduced the importance of particularly fertile patches of land and had an evening effect on the distribution of wealth. Weiss argues that competitive or adaptive advantages of absorbing climatic uncertainty through land-use strategies produced a more even playing field in northern Mesopotamia. Weiss (1986) 98.

This may explain why the region's fertility remains somewhat implicit in the Roman imperial authors.

Our sources describe the fertility of the region in the Roman period. Both Strabo and Pliny refer to the fertility of the northern areas of the Mesopotamian Borderland at the foot of the Taurus Mountains: Strabo says that Mygdonia is εὐδαίμων ἱκανῶς ("prosperous"), while Pliny uses *ubertatem* ("abundant").⁴⁹ Both authors begin their descriptions with these remarks and, while they do not elaborate, the prominent placement of the statements suggests that fertility was an important characteristic of northern Mesopotamia. Historical descriptions of events in the region bear this out. Describing a gift of part of Armenia to a Parthian king, Josephus describes the country around Nisibis as "good" (ἀγαθός), surely a reference to its fertility.⁵⁰ In Polybius' account of Antiochus III's march from Antioch against the rebellious satrap Molon, Antiochus and his army sat out the worst of the winter for forty days at Nisibis.⁵¹ This implies the ability to store substantial quantities of food drawn from a fertile hinterland. In Plutarch's account of Lucullus' campaign against Tigranes in the first century CE, Lucullus had defeated the Armenian forces blocking the road to their capital at Artaxata (near modern Artashat), but bad weather and discontent in the ranks forced him to turn south. The army descended into Mygdonia, "an area productive and open to the sun" (χώραν παμφόρον καὶ ἀλσεινήν).⁵² In his *Life of Apollonius*, Philostratus' description

49 Strabo 16.1.23; Pliny 6.117. I take the description of extreme fertility at Strabo 16.1.14 to refer to Babylonia specifically, rather than the entire land of the Assyrians.

50 Josephus *Ant. Jud.* 20.68: "ἔδωκεν δὲ καὶ χώραν πολλὴν αὐτῷ ἀγαθὴν τοῦ τῶν Ἀρμενίων βασιλείως. Νίσιβις δὲ ἐστὶν ὄνομα τῇ γῇ, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ πρότερον Μακεδόνες ἐκτίσαντο πόλιν Ἀντιόχειαν, ἣν Ἐπιμυγδονίαν προσηγόρευσαν." (He furthermore gave him an extensive and productive territory which he carved from that of the king of Armenia. The district is called Nisibis, and in it the Macedonians had in days of old founded the city of Antioch which they surnamed Epimygdonia.) Loeb trans. Josephus is confused; Nisibis is a city, not a district, and is the same place as Antioch Epimygdonia, Mygdonian Antioch. Cassius Dio (68.26.1) mentions the forests around Nisibis which existed in Trajan's time. Ammianus Marcellinus (19.9.5) also mentions forests between Samosata and Nisibis in the fourth century.

51 Polybius 5.51.1.

52 Plut. *Luc.* 32.4: "ὥς δ' οὐκ ἔπειθεν, ἀπῆγεν αὐτοὺς ὀπίσω, καὶ κατ' ἄλλας ὑπερβολὰς διελθὼν τὸν Ταῦρον, εἰς τὴν λεγομένην Μυγδονικὴν κατέβαινε, χώραν παμφόρον καὶ ἀλσεινήν καὶ πόλιν ἐν αὐτῇ μεγάλην καὶ πολυάνθρωπον ἔχουσιν, ἣν οἱ μὲν βάρβαροι Νίσιβιν, οἱ δ' Ἕλληνες Ἀντιόχειαν Μυγδονικὴν προσηγόρευον." (But since he could not persuade them, he led them back, and crossing the Taurus by another pass, descended into the country called Mygdonia, which is fertile and open to the sun and contains a large and populous city called Nisibis by the Barbarians, Antioch in Mygdonia by the Greeks.) Loeb trans.

of Mesopotamia as a land of villages reflects the archaeological evidence.⁵³ Ammianus Marcellinus' geographical description of northern Mesopotamia is lost, but he refers to the region's fertility in the course of describing historical events, such as the return of Julian's army to Roman territory.⁵⁴ Military expeditions down the Euphrates often returned to Roman territory through the fertile northern part of the borderland, a tendency which ancient authors often attributed to logistical concerns.⁵⁵ The ample opportunities for supply in the north were regularly contrasted with scarcity and lack in the harsh desert environment of the lands along the Euphrates.

The Roman imperial geographic writers show the Mesopotamian Borderland as a fertile and productive region, yet, as we shall see, they seldom show the activity of local networks or its participation in intra-imperial networks of exchange and commercial movement. Despite this omission, the combination of evident fertility and imperial control implies the existence of local distribution networks to transfer goods between the cities and the countryside. There is little explicit discussion of these networks, but they can be viewed implicitly. Chapter 6 shows how the Roman imperial geographic writers focus their attention on inter-imperial routes at the expense of these local and intra-imperial routes.

The area comprising the Mesopotamian Borderland is usually included as an adjunct to Roman Syria in studies of the Roman Near East. Inasmuch as these regions shared a history and culture, this approach is justified. However, the distribution of the evidence naturally favours the well-preserved and researched cities of the Syrian coast. Fergus Millar and Maurice Sartre exemplify this style with the wide scope and focus on cultural change in their handbooks. Both utilise an exhaustive array of traditional historical sources to address the profound changes that Roman rule had on the communities of the Near East between Anatolia and Egypt.⁵⁶ Sartre organises his material thematically, examining how the Syrian cultural landscape was changed by the

53 Philostratus, *Apollonius* 1.20.2: "...ἐν ᾗ καὶ πόλεις μὲν, τὸ δὲ πλεῖστον κῶμαι..." (... in which are some cities but mostly villages ...).

54 Amm. Marc. 23.6.15–25. While his description of Assyria refers to the great wealth of that region (*ditissima*), his description of that region concerns Adiabene, Babylonia and Mesene.

55 Supply difficulties are often cited explicitly as the reason: Amm. Marc. 24.7.6 (Julian); Dio 76.9.3–5 (Septimius Severus). Trajan returned via Hatra: Dio 68.31. Nevertheless, the frequent use of the Euphrates route by large armies suggests that opportunities for waterborne supply mitigated any deficiency of forage and that a certain degree of rhetorical exaggeration may have been at work in our sources.

56 Millar (1993); Sartre (2001); I have consulted primarily the updated English translation which treats only the Roman material (c. 69 BCE to 272 CE): Sartre (2005).

arrival of Hellenism, then how Rome appropriated, organised, and was in turn influenced by that new landscape. Millar takes a regional approach, within which he addresses similar questions of interaction between Roman, Greek and local Aramaic cultures. One of his concerns is the interaction between the sedentary space of Roman-controlled Syria and the non-sedentary space in the steppe beyond. As a Near Eastern archaeologist, Warwick Ball approaches the subject from two directions quite distinct from the traditional classical perspectives of Millar and Sartre.⁵⁷ The first is an Iranian perspective, explicitly challenging the Eurocentrism of traditional classical approaches to the study of the Roman Near East. The second is an art-historical perspective, including extensive comparison and analysis of artistic and architectural evidence. Moreover, Ball explicitly addresses the influence of the Near East on Rome. Another regional handbook with a partially art-historical approach is that of Kevin Butcher.⁵⁸ Like Millar and Sartre, Butcher particularly examines cultural changes and the Hellenisation of the Near East.

Two regional monographs to explicitly study Mesopotamia are those of Michael Sommer and Peter Edwell.⁵⁹ Sommer examines Rome's eastern "steppe border", an area which he defines as encompassing the inland Near East from Syria to the Tigris, with a particular focus on the political entities of the region for which we have the most evidence: Palmyra, Edessa, Dura-Europus, Hatra. Sommer examines issues of imperial power, local institutions, and archaeological evidence for cultural interactions between local and imperial groups. Edwell's study focuses on the middle Euphrates, the stretch of the river between Samosata and Dura-Europus, but includes other areas pertinent to the frontier such as Palmyra and Hatra. Edwell critically evaluates many Mesopotamian archaeological sites, especially Dura-Europus, and the Sasanian royal inscriptions as they pertain to Shapur's campaigns of the mid-third century. While the spatial and chronological dimensions of these studies are very similar to those of this book, both Sommer and Edwell focus on internal political, cultural and military dynamics.

Mesopotamia and the middle Euphrates have also been the subject of broader archaeological studies which shed light on the role of mobility in the region. Several articles by Wilkinson have synthesised the dozens of archaeological survey projects which have examined the landscape of northern

57 Ball (2000).

58 Butcher (2003).

59 Sommer (2005); Edwell (2008).

Mesopotamia.⁶⁰ The interrelated advancements in the technological power, popular awareness and affordability of remote sensing technology in particular have proved invaluable. Kennedy and Riley's assembly of aerial photography, including several pioneering studies in the early twentieth century, provided new literal and figurative viewpoints on regional sites.⁶¹ More recently, Comfort, Abadie-Reynal and Ergeç have used satellite imagery to study crossing points on the Euphrates and to show the multiplicity of available routes connecting Syria with Mesopotamia.⁶² In more traditional research, Gaborit and Leriche provide a thorough compilation of sites on the middle Euphrates using evidence from geographical writers from the Hellenistic to Byzantine periods, travellers' accounts from the seventeenth to early-twentieth centuries, and recent archaeological work.⁶³

3 A Borderland Emerges

On the surface, the Roman imperial geographical texts present a stable and coherent picture of Roman power and spatial control, but tension and dynamism underlie those narratives. For three centuries, the Romano-Parthian borderland in Mesopotamia was contested between two powerful and dynamic empires, mostly inconclusively.⁶⁴ Until the second century, third parties in the borderland, be they minor kingdoms, cities or powerful individuals, influenced much of the interaction between Rome and Parthia.⁶⁵ Large scale Roman military expeditions began at the beginning of the second century with Trajan's invasion of Babylonia, but accelerated later in that century when Lucius Verus made lasting territorial conquests east of the Euphrates. Dysfunction at the centre of Roman power and the rise of the Sasanid dynasty in the third century changed the inter-imperial dynamics of the space again, leading to a more rigidly defined and militarised border and a succession of major wars resolved by official treaties and territorial exchanges. The geographical texts of

60 Wilkinson et al. (1994); Wilkinson (1995); Wilkinson (2000); Wilkinson et al. (2005). Wilkinson's primary interest lies in the Assyrian Empire, but his discussions and the survey evidence he presents have a much broader chronological scope which includes the Roman period.

61 Kennedy and Riley (1990).

62 Comfort et al. (2000); Comfort and Ergeç (2001).

63 Gaborit and Leriche (1998).

64 For a succinct summary of the exercise of imperial power in the Romano-Parthian borderland and its impact on the political geography of the region (with several useful maps), see Sommer (2005) 48–78.

65 Facella and Kaizer (2010).



MAP 1.2 Sites in the Mesopotamian Borderland

the period show traces of these developments and the processes which underpinned them. This section outlines the historical context of the Mesopotamian Borderland through the lenses of two borderland kingdoms (Commagene and Osrhoene) and the imperial struggles of the third and fourth centuries. These overlapping narratives show the fluidity of borderland relationships in the interface between two imperial powers and provide a glimpse into the dynamics of historical change that underlie the static images of imperial power constructed by the geographical texts.

3.1 *Changing Landscapes: Commagene*

According to Strabo, Commagene was brought into the Seleucid Empire by Antiochus III.⁶⁶ The Commagenean kings claimed Persian links through the

66 Cohen (2006) 30–32. For a narrative of the Commagenean kings, see Facella (2006); Sullivan (1977). The Orontes named by Strabo (11.14.15) was king of Commagene, Facella

Armenian royal house, Macedonian links through Seleucid marriages and drew on both Iranian and Greek cultural traditions, including a combination of Iranian and Greek dynastic names (Antiochus, Samos, Mithridates).⁶⁷ Around 163/2 BCE, as Seleucid rule succumbed to internal and external pressures, a man named Ptolemaios, whom Diodorus calls the Seleucid governor (ἐπιστάτης) of Commagene, rebelled from Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and Commagene became an independent Hellenistic kingdom.⁶⁸ It is likely that Tigranes of Armenia brought the kingdom under his rule when he conquered the remains of the Seleucid Empire.⁶⁹ Tigranes probably simply made the Commagenean king his subject; there is no evidence for a break in the dynasty.

Commagene's position as a definitive borderland state in the early Roman period can be seen in a brief survey of interaction between its kings and the Roman dynasts who jostled for power in Syria. Commagene appears sporadically in historical accounts of the first century CE. Its kings delicately managed a liminal borderland position and the shifting currents of late republican politics. Antiochus I of Commagene (70–36 BCE) is named as one of the allies of Lucullus, but how that came about is unclear; Dio notes the friendship, but

(2006) 95–135. Memnon calls Antiochus III king of Syria and Commagene (Ἀντίοχον τὸν Συρίας καὶ Κομμαγενῆς καὶ Ἰουδαίας βασιλέα), *FGrH* 434 F 18.5; 18.9.

67 Facella (2005a) 87–94, especially for the Seleucid links. The artistic style of Commagene: Collidge (1987) 158–59; Cohen (2006) 30–32, especially n. 32; A.J.M. Kropp (2013). Andrade discusses the representational strategies of Antiochus I at (2013) 74–83.

68 For Ptolemaios' position, see Facella (2006) 199–205. Pressures on the Seleucids: Sullivan (1977) 737–47; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 217–29. The rebellion of Ptolemaios: Diod. 31.19a; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 225–26; Sullivan (1990) 59–62; Facella (2005a) 87–88; Facella (2010) 192; Sartre (2005) 23–24. The dating is from coin evidence for the start of a dynastic era: Sullivan (1977) 746. For the royal house and their connections to other Near Eastern royal houses, see the stemma in Sullivan (1977) 742.

69 The conquest is not attested in the literary sources, but inferred from the geography and from the presence of Armenian iconography in visual representations of Antiochus I: Sullivan (1977) 761; Facella (2006) 219–20. Appian (Syr., 48) reports that Tigranes ruled Syria for 14 years, Justin (40.1.4) gives 18 years. The discrepancy may reflect the time it took his Armenian armies to conquer the last of the Seleucid kingdom: Liebmann-Frankfort (1969) 193f.; Sullivan (1977) 760. Commagene was probably one of the first to be conquered because of its geographical position. Our only reference for conflict near Commagene is Strabo (16.2.3), who notes that Tigranes besieged the Seleucid queen in a city which was later attached to Commagene: “ἐν ᾗ τὴν Σελήνην ἐπικληθεῖσαν Κλεοπάτραν Τιγράνης ἀνείλε, καθείρξας χρόνον τινὰ ἡνίκα τῆς Συρίας ἐξέπεσεν.” (In [Seleucia (on the Euphrates)] Tigranes killed Selene, surnamed Cleopatra, who had been trapped there for some time when she was driven out of Syria.) This was Cleopatra Selene I, wife of Antiochus VIII Grypus, Antiochus IX Cyzicenus and Antiochus X Eusebes. Kosmin (2014) 16–24 (with the bibliography in n. 38) provides a brief survey of the Seleucid dynasty.

Pliny mentions a siege of Samosata by Lucullus.⁷⁰ Appian writes that Pompey forced (ἐπολέμησε) Antiochus to become his client (ἐς φιλίαν) then placed him in charge of “the parts of Mesopotamia which he [Pompey] had captured”.⁷¹ Details on Pompey’s activities in northern Mesopotamia are slim, but the area assigned to Antiochus may have included the foothills as far east as Nisibis. Appian’s use of πολεμέω (“to make war”) suggests that Antiochus resisted Pompey. If so, Antiochus may have resisted Pompey out of loyalty to Lucullus or out of a desire to retain a degree of independence which Lucullus may have granted him. However, Appian most likely overstated Antiochus’ resistance, either to glorify Pompey’s military achievements himself or because he found Commagene listed among the locations over which Pompey celebrated his triumph and thus assumed that he had conquered the kingdom.⁷² Pompey cannot have been overly concerned with the degree to which Antiochus resisted, as he left him on the throne and extended his lands;⁷³ for his part, Antiochus contributed troops to Pompey’s army at Pharsalus.⁷⁴ Antiochus was probably one of the twelve foreign kings who offered their alliance to Pompey near the beginning of his campaign.⁷⁵ Antiochus had been an ally of Lucullus against Tigranes and maintained his alliance with Rome through the person of the next Roman commander.⁷⁶ Antiochus does not appear in the accounts of Crassus’ expedition. He seems to have remained loyal to Rome when the Parthians invaded Syria in 52 and 51 BCE; Cicero, then governor of Cilicia, reported to the senate that Antiochus sent him information about Parthian movements, although the probable movement of Parthian troops through

70 Dio 36.2.5; IGLSyr 52 = OGIS 404; Pliny *NH* 2.235. Plut. *Luc.* 29.5–6 does not list Commagene among Lucullus’ allies. Facella (2006) 225–97.

71 App. *Mith.* 106: “ὁ δὲ Πομπήιος καὶ τὸν Ταύρον ὑπερελθὼν ἐπολέμησε μὲν Ἀντιόχῳ τῷ Κομμαγενῶ, ἕως ἐς φιλίαν ὁ Ἀντίοχος αὐτῷ συνήλθεν...” (After crossing the Taurus, Pompey fought Antiochus of Commagene until Antiochus entered into friendship with him). App. *Mith.* 114: “Ἀντιόχῳ δὲ τῷ Κομμαγενῶ Σελεύκειαν ἐπέτρεψε, καὶ ὅσα τῆς Μεσοποταμίας ἄλλα κατέδραμεν” (“[Pompey] entrusted Seleucia and the other parts of Mesopotamia that he had overrun to Antiochus of Commagene.”). Strabo 16.2.3. Facella (2006) 230–36.

72 On Pompey’s triumph: Pliny *NH* 7.97–98; 37.12–19; Diod. 40.4; Plut. *Pomp.* 36.2. Pompey probably claimed to have conquered Commagene. Sherwin-White (1984) 208–9; Facella (2010) 183.

73 Strabo (16.2.3) reports the addition of Zeugma, one of the most important cities on the middle Euphrates. On the military importance of Zeugma, see Hartmann and Speidel (2003) 101–3. On the economic value of Zeugma as a transit point, see Facella (2005b) 233.

74 App. *BC* 2.49.

75 For a discussion of the *philia* between Antiochus and Pompey, especially regarding the likely responsibilities of Antiochus regarding the Parthians, see Facella (2010) 183–86.

76 Plut. *Pomp.* 38.2.

Commagene aroused suspicion.⁷⁷ Antiochus was among the beneficiaries of Caesar's *clementia* after Pharsalus.⁷⁸ However, the justification (or perhaps pretext as Dio notes) for the siege of Samosata by Ventidius and Antony in 38 BCE was that Antiochus was thought to have harboured Parthian fugitives after the defeat of Pakores' invasion a few years earlier.⁷⁹ Regardless of the truth of that accusation, Antiochus was active in both imperial centres: he appeared before the Senate to argue for his possession of a town near Zeugma,⁸⁰ married his daughter to a Parthian king, and was subsequently killed in 36 BCE when he protested her murder by that king's successor, possibly at court in Ctesiphon.⁸¹ Antiochus' son Mithridates II (36–20 BCE) sent troops to help Antonius at Actium.⁸² Octavian annexed Zeugma and Doliche from Commagene to Syria, perhaps because of this support.⁸³ Dio reports dynastic strife between Mithridates II and his brother Antiochus II in 29 BCE.⁸⁴ Although that brother

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- 77 Cic. *Ad Fam.* 15.1.2; 15.2.2; 15.3.1; 15.4.3. Facella (2005a) 94–98; Sullivan (1977) 766–67; Syme (1995) 96. Dio (49.19.3) notes that the Parthians usually crossed the Euphrates at Zeugma, within Commagene. Caelius Rufus wrote to Cicero that Deiotarus had reported that the Parthians were moving through Commagene in 51 BCE (Cic. *Ad Fam.* 8.10.1). We might well question whether Antiochus had the military capability to stop the Parthian forces had he wished to do so. Suspicion in 17 and 72 CE: Kennedy (1996a) 729–30. Cicero does not seem to have placed much trust in Antiochus, Facella (2010) 185–86; Facella (2005a) 96–98.
- 78 *Bell. Alex.* 65: “Reges, tyrannos, dynastas provinciae finitimos, qui omnes ad eum concurrerant, receptos in fidem condicionibus impositis provinciae tuendae ac defendendae dimittit et sibi et populo Romano amicissimos.” (The kings, tyrants and rulers neighbouring the province, who had all come to him, he received into the *fides* of Rome on the condition that they watch out for and defend the province and sent them out as friends to himself and the Roman people). Caesar's relationship with Antiochus: Facella (2010) 194–95.
- 79 Dio 49.20.3. For accounts of Pakores' invasion of Syria, see Justin 42.4.5–10, Josephus *BJ* 1.248–322. Cassius Dio (49.20.5, 22.2; 48.41.5) and Plutarch (*Ant.* 34) report that the Roman forces withdrew after Antiochus paid them a large sum (Plutarch says 300 talents). Plutarch records that Ventidius and Antony failed to capture Samosata. Josephus (*BJ* 1.321–22) reports that Herod assisted Antony in the successful capture of Samosata. Plutarch's account seems more likely. Facella (2006) 244–50.
- 80 Cicero did not trust him: he explicitly notes this at *Ad Fam.* 15.1.2 and see the discussion of Facella (2005a) 94–98. Cicero also reports that he mocked and thwarted Antiochus, *Ad Quint. Frat.* 2.10.2, with an unpacking of Cicero's wit at Facella (2005a) 97–98.
- 81 Dio 49.23.3–4. The new king was Phraates IV, whose coup is also recorded by Plutarch (*Ant.* 37.1; *Cras.* 33.5). Plutarch does not mention the death of Antiochus.
- 82 Plut. *Ant.* 61.
- 83 The annexation of Zeugma in 31 BCE is deduced from the beginning of a new dating era on locally minted coins, Wagner (1976) 64; followed by Millar (1993) 29–30; Sartre (2005) 56. This reading (of a single coin) is contested by Butcher (1998) 233.
- 84 Dio 52.43.1. Facella (2006) 299–300.

is usually enumerated as a king of Commagene, is it unclear whether he ever ruled. At most, he held power jointly with Mithridates. Octavian clearly had no desire to see internal strife in Commagene; he summoned Antiochus II to Rome and had him executed. When Octavian visited the east in 20 BCE, he confirmed Mithridates III as king.⁸⁵ Around the same time, the young Mithridates was married to a princess of Atropatene. In these years leading up to the return of Crassus' standards, relatively friendly relations between Rome and Parthia seem to have encouraged cross-border interaction between their respective client kingdoms. In the late republic, Commagenean kings forged new political links with a succession of Roman generals, local rulers and Parthian kings. They carefully balanced these network ties as best they could to ensure their own prosperity and continued rule.

For Commagene, the political turbulence continued in the first century CE. The consolidation of the Roman Empire emphasised the relative importance of the links between Rome and Commagene, with the result that there were several administrative changes in Commagene as imperial policy fluctuated. Mithridates III was succeeded by Antiochus III, whose death in 17 CE set off a period of alternating direct and indirect Roman control of Commagene. According to Josephus, Antiochus' death provoked conflict between the masses (τὸ πλῆθος) who wanted the monarchy to continue and the notables (τοὺς γνωρίμους) who wanted Commagene to be annexed by Rome.⁸⁶ Tacitus reports that the majority wanted Roman rule and the minority wanted the monarchy to continue ("plerisque Romanum, aliis regium imperium cupientibus").⁸⁷ Josephus' account is more probable because the nobility most likely saw more advantage in the removal of the monarchy. Tacitus probably reports the official Roman version.⁸⁸ Tiberius dispatched Germanicus to settle the matter,

85 Dio 54.9.1–3; cf. Suet. *Aug.* 48. Facella (2006) 312–14.

86 Joseph. *AJ* 18.53–54. For this episode, including a possible connection to the Syriac *Letter of Mara Bar Sarapion*, see Speidel (2005) 90–93. Facella (2006) 316–18.

87 Tac. *Ann.* 2.42.5. Facella suggests that the wealth of the kingdom played a role in this decision: Facella (2010) 195. Speidel (2005) argues that by the very act of submitting their request to Rome, the two parties "accepted their fate as subjects of the Roman Empire (just as their kings had done), that they were prepared to abide by the empire's rules and to accept the emperor's decision."

88 Sullivan (1977) 784–85. After the final annexation of Commagene, the royal family appear in Rome in the senatorial class, Sullivan (1977) 795–97; Kennedy (1996a) 731. An inscription from Commagene (Schmitz et al. (1988) = SEG 38.1544) shows the quick adaption to Roman rule of a family that seems to have been closely connected to the Commagenean royal house. Speidel (2005) 91–92 implies that the lack of attested public office among the "Romanized" generations suggests a decline in status for the family.

and Commagene was annexed to Syria in 18 CE.⁸⁹ Tacitus reports that “Quintus Servaeus was appointed to Commagene, at that time first brought under the jurisdiction of a praetor”.⁹⁰ Strabo wrote that the kingdom had recently (νῦν) become an *eparchia*. This word usually translated *provincia*, but perhaps here it indicates a prefecture subordinate to the governor of Syria, as in the case of Judaea and the Decapolis.⁹¹ Strabo’s use of νῦν cannot be used for precise dating, but here it must refer to Germanicus’ annexation which took place only a few years before Strabo wrote book 16 of his *Geography*.⁹²

Caligula re-established the kingdom under Antiochus IV in 37 CE and extended the new king’s dominions to include the Cilician coast.⁹³ After only a few years, Caligula deposed him, but he was restored again by Claudius.⁹⁴ Finally, after a long and active career of diplomacy and warfare, Antiochus IV was accused of plotting with the Parthians and was deposed for the last time by Vespasian in 72 CE.⁹⁵ Antiochus attained Roman citizenship and retired peacefully to Greece, where his descendants were prominent. His sons attempted to resist the annexation. However, they were defeated and fled to the Parthians who welcomed them, before finally returning to Roman territory and their father.

Vespasian’s final annexation of Commagene is relatively well reported in the sources. There has been much ancient and modern consideration of his motives for doing so, in part because it was a sudden reversal in fortune for Antiochus IV. Three related motives are discussed: the wealth of Commagene, the strategic importance of the area, and suspicion at links with Parthia.

Our sources consistently paint Commagene as a wealthy region.⁹⁶ Strabo describes the region around Samosata as particularly fertile (σφόδρα εὐδαίμων),

89 For a detailed discussion of the implications of Germanicus’ mission for Commagene, see Speidel (2005) 94–98.

90 Tac. *Ann.* 2.56: “Commagenis Q. Servaeus praeponitur, tum primum ad ius praetoris translatis”.

91 Strabo 16.2.3: “νῦν δ’ ἐπαρχία γέγονε”. Speidel (2005) 94–98; Sartre (2005) 57; Biffi (2002) 176.

92 Strabo’s note on the annexation of Commagene is one of the events by which Strabo’s *Geography* can be dated: Pothecary (1997); Dueck (1999); Pothecary (2002); and below.

93 Dio 59.8.2; Seut. *Calig.* 16.3. Facella (2006) 318–20; Speidel (2005) 88–89. After Germanicus’ annexation of Commagene, the children of Antiochus III were raised in Rome.

94 Given back by Claudius, having been taken away by Caligula in 41 CE: Dio 60.8.1; Joseph. *AJ* 19.276. Wiedemann (1996) 223. These fluctuations in imperial policy towards Commagene are also addressed by Speidel (2005).

95 Career: Sullivan (1977) 787–91; Kennedy (1996a) 731. Accusations and annexation: Joseph. *BJ* 7.219–43; Suet. *Vesp.* 8.4. Facella (2006) 331–38.

96 Facella (2005b) examines the literary and archaeological evidence for this wealth.

ὀλίγη δέ).⁹⁷ In his description of Melitene, Strabo describes that region as similar to (παραπλησία) Commagene before describing fruit trees, olive oil and wine.⁹⁸ Regardless of its source, Commagene's wealth was considerable. Facella suggests that the kingdom's wealth was a significant factor in many Roman policy decisions in the first centuries BCE and CE.⁹⁹ When Ventidius and Antony attempted to punish Antiochus for supporting the Parthian invasions of the 40s BCE, the Commagenean king initially offered to pay off Antony with 1000 talents.¹⁰⁰ The offer was rebuffed. According to Plutarch, this was because Antony required a personal victory, although Antony may have also thought that Commagene was a richer prize than that. Tacitus described Antiochus IV as the richest of Rome's client kings.¹⁰¹ When Caligula restored the Commagenean dynasty in 37 CE, he repaid the revenues which Rome had gained over the previous nineteen years; Seutonius reports that this amounted to 100 million sesterces.¹⁰²

The strategic importance of a rugged, fortified and defensible kingdom dominating north-south and east-west routes between Anatolia and the Fertile Crescent was as apparent to ancient commentators as it is to modern scholars.¹⁰³ In his account of Vespasian's annexation, Josephus records

97 Strabo 16.2.3.

98 Strabo 12.2.1: “Ἔστι δ’ ἡ μὲν Μελιτηνὴ παραπλησία τῇ Κομμαγενῇ πᾶσα γὰρ ἐστὶ τοῖς ἡμέροις δένδροις κατάφυτος, μόνη τῆς ἄλλης Καππαδοκίας, ὥστε καὶ ἔλαιον φέρειν καὶ τὸν Μοναρίτην οἶνον τοῖς Ἑλληνικοῖς ἐνάμιλλον.” (Melitene is similar to Commagene, for it is the only part of Cappadocia that is entirely planted with cultivated trees, so that it produces the olive and the Monarite wine, which is a match for the Hellenic.) Translation adapted from Roller (2014).

99 Facella (2010) 194–96.

100 Plut. Ant. 34.3: “βουλόμενος ἔν γε τοῦτο τῶν ἔργων ἐπώνυμον αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι καὶ μὴ πάντα διὰ Οὐνεντιδίου κατορθοῦσθαι.” ([Antony] insisted that this one exploit at least should bear his own name and that not all the successes should be due to Ventidius.) Loeb trans. Kennedy calculates this as 24 million sesterces, Kennedy (1996a) 731. The wealth of Commagene may have been why Ventidius campaigned there at all, Facella (2010) 195.

101 Tac. Hist. 2.81.1: “Antiochus vastus opibus ingens et servientium regum ditissimus” (Antiochus, who had vast ancient wealth and was the wealthiest of the subject kings). Josephus (*BJ* 5.461) also mentions Antiochus' wealth.

102 Suet. Cal. 16.3. Thus Antiochus' attempted payment to Antony amounted to about five years. Facella (2005b) 235 defends the plausibility of Suetonius' figure by comparison to the contemporary revenue of Judaea attested by Josephus (*AJ* 19.352) as 12 million drachma.

103 Kennedy (1996a) 729–30 attributes the annexation of 17 CE to strategic concerns and that of 72 CE to collaboration with the Parthians. Facella (2010) notes the presence of compelling reasons of internal and external security for annexation and argues that only the good working relationship between the Commagenean kings and Rome prevented an earlier annexation (p. 197). Speidel (2005) 98–100 notes that the Commagenean royal

that Commagene's location heightened concern about rumours of Parthian collaboration.¹⁰⁴ The strategic importance of Commagene had been demonstrated by Corbulo's war against Parthia between 54 and 64 CE. As with most conflicts between Parthia and Rome, the prize and the site of conflict was Armenia, but the centre of Rome's eastern power was in Syria.¹⁰⁵ Between 62 and 64 CE, the war threatened to spread south.¹⁰⁶ As governor of Syria, Corbulo massed on the Euphrates, threw up bridges and established a fortified bridgehead on the eastern bank.¹⁰⁷ However, when he marched to the relief of Caesennius Paetus in Armenia, his route was on the Roman side of the river, through Commagene and Cappadocia, leaving a significant force to occupy those Euphrates fortifications (*munimenta Euphrati imposita*).¹⁰⁸ Commagene's important geographical position, both between the Roman province of Syria and the contested kingdom of Armenia and astride the northern route through northern Mesopotamia, was a compelling argument for bringing the kingdom under the direct control of the governor of Syria.¹⁰⁹ This would have been familiar to Vespasian from his extensive experience in the eastern provinces and kingdoms.¹¹⁰

The proximity of the kingdom to Parthian territory cast suspicion on the loyalty of its rulers. Josephus reports that Vespasian's annexation was precipitated by an accusation that Antiochus IV was planning to switch his allegiance to Parthia.¹¹¹ Antiochus had a long history of service to Rome and to the

army was about the strength of the single legion that replaced it, so Vespasian's move should be seen as part of an imperial plan to unify the frontier under direct Roman command rather than as a strengthening of a weak point.

104 Joseph. *BJ* 7.223–24: “ἔμελλε Καῖσαρ τοιοῦτου μηνύματος αὐτῷ προσπεσόντος μὴ περιορᾶν: καὶ γὰρ ἡ γειτνίασις τῶν βασιλέων ἐποίει τὸ πρᾶγμα μείζονος ἄξιον προνοίας: [224] τὰ γὰρ Σαμόσατα τῆς Κομμαγενῆς μεγίστη πόλις κείται παρὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην, ὥστ’ εἶναι τοῖς Πάρθοις, εἴ τι τοιοῦτον διενενόηντο, ῥᾶστην μὲν τὴν διάβασιν βεβαίαν δὲ τὴν ὑποδοχὴν.” (Now Caesar was disposed to take some care about the matter, since this discovery was made; for the neighborhood of the kingdoms made this affair worthy of greater regard; for Samosata, the capital of Commagene, lies upon Euphrates, and upon any such design could afford an easy passage over it to the Parthians, and could also afford them a secure reception.).

105 Corbulo's campaign is described by Bivar (2000) 81–85.

106 Vologeses was based at Nisibis in 60 CE, Tac. *Ann.* 15.5.

107 Tac. *Ann.* 15.9; Dio 62.20.

108 Tac. *Ann.* 15.9–12; Dio 62.21.

109 Importance of those routes for commerce and cultural contact: Sullivan (1977) 734, 762; Facella (2005b) esp. 232–234 and 239; and Chapter 6.

110 The annexation of Commagene was part of a broader reorganisation of the Roman military system in the east: Edwell (2008) 18–20; Griffin (2000a) 38–40; Speidel (2005) 98–100.

111 Joseph. *BJ* 7.219–22: “Ἦδη δὲ ἔτος τέταρτον Οὐεσπασιανοῦ διέποντος τὴν ἡγεμονίαν συνέβη τὸν βασιλέα τῆς Κομμαγενῆς Ἀντίοχον μεγάλας συμφοραῖς πανοικεσίᾳ περιπεσεῖν ἀπὸ τοιαύτης αἰτίας: [220] Καϊσένιος Παῖτος, ὁ τῆς Συρίας ἡγεμὼν τότε καθεστηκώς, εἴτ’ οὖν ἀληθεύων

Flavian family in particular. He had contributed royal troops to Roman armies in Judaea in 66, 67 and 70, and had supported Vespasian in his imperial claim.¹¹² However, that his sons were received warmly by the Parthian king after their failed resistance to the annexation speaks to friendly ties to Parthia, or at least that the Parthian king was open to the idea of friendly relations and an alliance. Antiochus, like most of his predecessors, had maintained strong political connections with the important political actors of the Near East, so links to the Parthian king and Parthian subjects in the region would not be surprising. Despite violently annexing his kingdom, Vespasian restored relations with the deposed Commagenean house who entered senatorial politics in later generations.¹¹³ Commagene's extensive network of regional political connections were valuable in the late republic, but may have ultimately harmed the dynasty in the new political environment dominated by two empires. In situations where two states or empires are in conflict, cross-border transactions between entities in their border zones are often discouraged or illegal.¹¹⁴

Another factor in Vespasian's decision may have been the precedent that Rome had set. Roman emperors had spent much of the previous half-century manipulating peripheral client states to destabilise the Parthian monarchy. Following the destabilised political conditions of 69 CE, Vespasian might legitimately fear Parthian interference in Roman dynastic affairs and seek to shore up his power. Indeed, Vologeses had offered to support Vespasian in 69 and the Parthians supported false Neros in 79/80 and 88.¹¹⁵ Commagene was strategically located, well-connected politically and wealthy. Regardless

εἶτε καὶ διὰ τὴν πρὸς Ἀντίοχον ἔχθραν, οὐ σφόδρα γὰρ τὸ σαφὲς ἠλέγχθη, [221] γράμματα πρὸς Καίσαρα διεπέμψατο, λέγων τὸν Ἀντίοχον μετὰ τοῦ παιδὸς Ἐπιφανοῦς διεγνωκέναι Ῥωμαίων ἀφίστασθαι συνθήκας πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα τῶν Πάρθων πεποιημένον: [222] δεῖν οὖν προκαταλαβεῖν αὐτούς, μὴ φθάσαντες τῶν πραγμάτων [ἄρξασθαι] πᾶσαν τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν πολέμῳ συνταράξωσιν." (And now, in the fourth year of the reign of Vespasian, it came to pass that Antiochus, the king of Commagene, with all his family, fell into very great calamities. The occasion was this: Cesennius Petus, who was governor of Syria at this time, whether it were done out of regard to truth, or whether out of hatred to Antiochus (for which the real motive was never thoroughly discovered), sent an letter to Caesar, and therein told him that Antiochus, with his son Epiphanes, had resolved to rebel against the Romans, and had made a league with the king of Parthia to that purpose; that it was therefore fit to prevent them, lest they prevent us, and begin such a war as may cause a general disturbance in the Roman Empire.) Loeb trans.

112 Troops: Joseph. *BJ* 2.500f (5000 in 66 CE); Joseph. *BJ* 3.68 (3000 in 67 CE); Joseph. *BJ* 5.460–63; Tac. *Hist.* 5.1.2 (in 70 CE); Speidel (2005) 98; Hartmann and Speidel (2003) 102. Support for Vespasian: Tac. *Ann.* 2.81.1.

113 Facella (2005a) 99–100.

114 See Minghi (1991) 16–17.

115 Tac. *Hist.* 2.82.3; 4.51.2. False Neros: Griffin (2000a) 41.

of the likelihood of rebellion from Roman control, such a rebellion would be potentially dangerous. Moreover, direct control of the richest client kingdom in the Near East would be lucrative.

With Vespasian's annexation, Commagene ceased to become a borderland state, although it remained an identifiable sub-region within Syria. Pliny and Ptolemy both included Commagene as a sub-region of Syria.¹¹⁶ By the beginning of the second century, the strategic importance of Commagene can be seen in the situation of a legionary base at the kingdom's former capital (Σαμώσατα Λεγίων). In his description of the eastern *limes*, Ammianus calls the area *Commagena* in the first instance, glossing it with the more recent provincial appellation *nunc Euphratensis*.¹¹⁷ In fact, Ammianus' inclusion of Hierapolis grants *Commagena* a broader application than the historical Commagene ever had, a consequence of the anachronistic implied equivalence of a contemporary and a historical space.

The complex and turbulent history of Commagene's experience in the Romano-Parthian borderland is reflected in the geographical descriptions of the early principate. Strabo's more dynamic and historical geographic project refers to the different recent states of Commagenean independence in its description of the area. His description emphasises Roman control over the political landscape as a capstone on the history of the kingdom. For his part, Pliny nods to the historical divisions of the space in his listing of former names of the component parts of now-Roman Syria, but otherwise gives a static and ahistorical account which emphasises the present status of Commagene as a part of a stable imperial whole. While he shows the ambiguous status of northern Mesopotamia itself, Commagene is treated unambiguously as part of Roman Syria.

3.2 *Shifting Currents: Osrhoene*

On the eastern bank of the Euphrates, another independent state had appeared out of the dissolving Seleucid Empire. Syriac chronicles of the sixth and eighth centuries CE date the foundation of the Abgarid dynasty in Edessa

¹¹⁶ Pliny *NH* 5.66–67; Ptol. *Geog.* 5.15.10–11.

¹¹⁷ Amm. Marc. 14.8.7: "Et prima post Osdroenam quam, ut dictum est, ab hac descriptione discrevimus, Commagena (nunc Euphratensis), clementer assurgit, Hierapoli (vetere Nino) et Samosata civitatibus amplis illustris." (And first after Osdroene, which, as has been said, I have omitted from this account, Commagene, now called Euphratensis, gradually rises, famed for the great cities of Hierapolis (ancient Ninus) and Samosata.) Jonge (1972) 67–68. Procopius (*Wars* 1.17.2) records the same renaming of Commagene to Euphratensis. Facella (2006) 51–52.

to the 130s BCE.¹¹⁸ Because of the continued survival of Edessa's Syriac name (Orhai), as well as the later explosion of Syriac literary culture itself, Ross suggests that the elite of Osroene were weakly Hellenised and prized their native culture.¹¹⁹ The relationship between Osroene, the Arsacids and Tigranes is unclear, although there is no sign of a break in the Abgarid dynasty under either the Parthians or the Armenians. The Abgarids first appear in relation to Roman power when Pompey confirmed Abgar of Edessa on his way back to Syria from Armenia.¹²⁰ A few years earlier, Macedonian colonists at Carrhae had helped Afranius, one of Pompey's generals, but there is no evidence that Carrhae was part of Abgar's kingdom.¹²¹

Roman power took hold in Syria through the co-option of pre-existing local networks and their existing power structures.¹²² In 54 BCE, Crassus crossed the Euphrates, defeated the local Parthian satrap and occupied many cities between the Euphrates and the Balikh, including Ichnae, Nicephorion and Zenodotium.¹²³ Dio stresses the willingness of Greek and Macedonian colonists to transfer their allegiance from the Parthians to the Romans.¹²⁴ There is probably an element of truth to this. Greek-speaking descendants of Greek and Macedonian colonists were likely to have widespread networks of communication with other such colonists in Syria and other areas under Roman control, and they might hope for preferential treatment. However, the idea that local Greeks supported the invasion of a philhellenic Rome is a pro-Roman

118 The *Chronicle of Edessa* and *Chronicle of Zuqnin* respectively: Ross (2001) 9; Brock (1979) 3–4 (Edessa); 10 (Zuqnin). Sommer (2005) 228–29.

119 Ross (2001) 8; Andrade (2013) 318–19; Sommer (2005) 228–30. Although Gawlikowski (1998) 421 notes that the name “Orhai” may just have applied to the tribe and not the place which later bore the Macedonian name “Edessa”.

120 Dio 40.20. Ross (2001) 10. The regnal numbering of the Abgarid kings is not secure and is largely omitted here.

121 Dio 37.5.5. Ross (2001) 10, 22–28.

122 Sartre (2005) 42–44.

123 Dio 40.12.2–13.4; Arr. *FGrH* 156 F 33; Plut. *Cras.* 17.2–4. On Crassus' modest advance, barely past Osroene: Sherwin-White (1984) 282–83. Zenodotium: Olshausen, Eckart, “Zenodotium” *BNP*. Ichnae: Isidore 1: “Ἰχναί, πόλις Ἑλληνίς, Μακεδόνων κτίσμα.” (Ichnai, a Hellenic city and Macedonian foundation); Kessler, Karlheinz, “Ichnae” *BNP*.

124 Dio 40.13.1: “τῶν γὰρ Μακεδόνων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν συστρατευσάντων σφίσιν Ἑλλήνων ἄποικοι πολλοί, βίᾳ ἀχθόμενοι καὶ ἐς τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ὡς καὶ φιλέλληνας πολλὰ ἐλπίζοντες, οὐκ ἀκουσίως μεθίσταντο.” (For colonists in great numbers, descendants of the Macedonians and of the other Greeks who had campaigned in Asia with them, readily transferred their allegiance to the Romans, since they were oppressed by the violence of the barbarians, and placed strong hopes in the invaders, whom they regarded as friends of the Greeks.) Loeb trans. Local supporters of Crassus provided information about the approaching Parthian army: Plut. *Cras.* 18.2–3.

narrative. Our sources, Dio and Plutarch, were Greek writers within the Roman Empire. The ideological appeal to a shared Greek culture was available to both Rome and local communities who were plausibly able to identify themselves as “Greek”. Moreover, it was not the exclusive property of Rome. The Parthian Empire was also home to many communities founded by Macedonian dynasts, in particular at Seleucia on the Tigris. In the accounts of both Crassus and Dio, the Greek-named city Zenodotium, with the Greek-named tyrant Apollonius, was the only significant resistance to Crassus’ occupation of northwestern Mesopotamia; he fled to Parthia. Those Greek names do not necessarily indicate ethnicity, but they do denote an appeal to Greek culture which clearly did not manifest itself as an allegiance to Rome. Nevertheless, such an appeal to connections and influence on the basis of a shared ideology of Greekness appears frequently in the accounts of Rome’s northern Mesopotamian activities. The texts of the Roman geographic writers were part of this articulation and communication of a shared Hellenic culture.

The development of links between Rome and Osroëne is seen first in Crassus’ campaigns in 54 and 53 BCE. Abgar of Edessa was among the borderland rulers who supported Crassus. Abgar appears in Dio’s narrative as a master schemer who allies with Crassus in order to betray him on the battlefield.¹²⁵

125 Dio 40.20.1–21.1: “μέγιστον δὲ ὅμως αὐτοὺς ὁ Αὐγαρος ὁ Ὀρροηνὸς ἐλυμήνατο· ἔνσπονδος γὰρ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις ἐπὶ τοῦ Πομπηίου γενόμενος ἀνθεῖλετο τὰ τοῦ βαρβάρου. καὶ τοῦτο μὲν καὶ ὁ Ἀλχαυδόνιος ὁ Ἀράβιος ἐποίησε. πρὸς γὰρ τὸ ἰσχυρὸν αἰεὶ μεθίστατο. [2] ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνος μὲν ἐκ τοῦ προφανοῦς ἀπέστη, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο οὐ δυσφύλακτος ἦν· ὁ δ’ Αὐγαρος ἐφρόνει μὲν τὰ τοῦ Πάρθου, ἐπλάττετο δὲ τῷ Κράσσῳ φιλικῶς ἔχειν, καὶ χρήματά τε ἀφειδῶς αὐτῷ ἀνήλπισκε, καὶ τὰ τε βουλευόμενα αὐτοῦ πάντα καὶ ἐμάνθανε καὶ ἐκεῖνῳ διήγγελλε, καὶ προσέτι εἰ μὲν τι χρηστὸν ἦν, ἀπέτρεπε αὐτόν, εἰ δ’ ἀσύμφορον, ἐπέσπερχε. [3] καὶ δὴ καὶ τοιόνδε τι τελευτῶν ἔπραξε. τοῦ γὰρ Κράσσου πρὸς Σελεύκειαν ὁρμήσαι διανοομένου, ὥστε ἐκεῖσέ τε ἀσφαλῶς παρὰ τε τὸν Εὐφράτην καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ τῷ τε στρατῷ καὶ τοῖς ἐπιτιθεῖσι κομισθῆναι, καὶ μετ’ αὐτῶν (προσποιοῦσθαι γὰρ σφας ἅτε καὶ Ἑλληνας ῥαδίως ἡλπίζεν) ἐπὶ Κτησιφώντα μὴ χαλεπῶς περαιωθῆναι, [4] τούτου μὲν ὥς καὶ χρονίου ἐσομένου ἀμελήσαι αὐτὸν ἐποίησε, τῷ δὲ δὴ Σουρήνῃ ὥς καὶ ἐγγὺς [21.1] καὶ μετ’ ὀλίγων ὄντι συμμῖξαι ἔπεισε. καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο παρασκευάσας τὸν μὲν ὅπως ἀπόληται τὸν δ’ ὅπως κρατήσῃ (συνεχῶς γὰρ προφάσει κατασκοπῆς τῷ Σουρήνῃ συνεγγίνετο), ἐξήγαγε τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ἀφροντιστοῦντας ὥς ἐπὶ νίκην ἔτοιμον, καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ἔργῳ συνεπέθετο.” ([20.1] Nevertheless, the greatest injury was done them by Abgarus of Osroëne. For he had pledged himself to peace with the Romans in the time of Pompey, but now chose the side of the barbarians. The same was done by Alchaudonius, the Arabian, who always attached himself to the stronger party. [2] The latter, however, revolted openly, and hence was not hard to guard against; but Abgarus, while favouring the Parthian cause, pretended to be well disposed toward Crassus. He spent money for him unsparingly, learned all his plans and reported them to the foe, and further, if any of them was advantageous for the Romans, he tried to divert him from it, but if disadvantageous, urged him forward. [3] At last he was responsible for the following occurrence. Crassus was intending to advance to Seleucia so as to reach there safely with his army

In Plutarch's account, an Arab phylarch named Ariamnes (probably to be identified with the same Abgar)¹²⁶ persuades Crassus to abandon the river bank and give the Parthians the advantage by advancing across the plains.¹²⁷ Both Dio and Plutarch are overly concerned to blame the loss on treachery. A tactical blunder, perhaps born of arrogance, seems more likely.¹²⁸ However, Abgar's actions are indicative of the kind of network links and power relations necessary for a small kingdom at a boundary between Roman and Parthian power. When a Roman army appeared on his doorstep and defeated the local Parthian forces, Abgar supported the victor until it was clear that the tide had turned, at which time he returned his allegiance to the Parthians.¹²⁹ His choices must have seemed limited; the alternative path was shown by Apollonius of Zenodotium.

The relatively limited appearance of Osrhoene and the Abgarids in the first century CE is reflected in Strabo's narrative. In fact, while Strabo mentions cities in the region, including Nikephorion and Batnae/Anthemusia, Osrhoene itself is not mentioned.¹³⁰ Given our poor knowledge of the extent of Abgar's kingdom at in this period, only Strabo's confused reference to Edessa can be said to illuminate his conception of Osrhoene. Even then, it is uncertain. That reference comes not in Strabo's discussion of Mygdonia, which does include nearby Carrhae, but in his description of commercial traffic alongside the Euphrates.¹³¹ Strabo's confusion in applying the name "Edessa" to what is most

and provisions by proceeding along the banks of the Euphrates and on its stream; accompanied then by the people of that city, whom he hoped to win over easily, because they were Greeks, he would cross without difficulty to Ctesiphon. [4] Abgarus caused him to give up this course, on the ground that it would take a long time, and persuaded him to assail Surenas, because the latter was nearby and had only a few men. [21.1] Then, when he had arranged matters so that the invader should perish and the other should conquer (for he was continually in the company of Surenas, on the pretext of spying), he led out the Romans in their heedlessness to what he represented as a victory in their very hands, and in the midst of the action joined in the attack against them.) Loeb trans.

126 Bivar (2000) 53; Ross (2001) 10; Sommer (2005) 233.

127 Plut. *Cras.* 21.1–4.

128 Sherwin-White blames the defeat on a tactical blunder, (1984) 288.

129 After defeating the Romans at Carrhae, the Parthians recovered the cities Crassus had taken, Dio 40.28.1: "οἱ δὲ δὴ Πάρθοι τότε μὲν οὐ περαιτέρω τοῦ Εὐφράτου προεχώρησαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ πᾶσαν ἀνεκτήσαντο." (The Parthians at this time did not advance behind the Euphrates, but won back the whole country east of it.) Loeb trans. Bivar (2000) 55–56; Sherwin-White (1984) 290.

130 The same is true of Isidore of Charax's account of a Euphrates route, discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

131 Strabo 16.1.27: "ὑπέρκειται δὲ τοῦ ποταμοῦ σχοῖνους τέτταρας διέχουσα ἡ Βαμβύκη, ἣν καὶ Ἐδεσσαν καὶ Ἱερὰν πόλιν καλοῦσιν, ἐν ᾗ τιμῶσι τὴν Συρίαν θεὸν τὴν Ἀταργάτιν." (Such travelers cross the Euphrates near Anthemusia, a place in Mesopotamia; and above the river,

likely a description of Hierapolis/Bambyke attests to the relative unimportance of Edessa and the Abgarid dynasty in his understanding of the borderland.

The example of Abgar and Crassus would be repeated twice in the Julio-Claudian period. In 35 CE, a conspiracy of Parthian nobles successfully appealed to Tiberius to release a son of the former Parthian king, Phraates IV, held hostage at Rome. Tacitus reports that the Parthian king, Artabanus II, had become so brutal to his people that they would desert him for a king with a better claim to Arsacid descent and Roman support.¹³² When the Parthian contender crossed the Euphrates, a number of important defectors joined him and he successfully captured Seleucia but was driven out soon after by Artabanus' new Iranian army.¹³³ In 49 CE, another embassy of Parthian nobles attempted to place another pro-Roman candidate on the Parthian throne, again by crossing the Euphrates and marching on Ctesiphon with the support of local rulers.¹³⁴ According to Tacitus, this attempt was also a failure because of treachery on the part of another Abgar of Osrhoene, whom he calls Abgar *rex arabum*. In these accounts of Roman attempts to expand their influence into the Parthian Empire in the first century CE, several kings east of the Euphrates, including Osrhoene, were seen as within the Parthian sphere but generally pro-Roman and willing to support such ventures. These events reveal the presence and operation of connections between a network of conspirators nominally under Parthian rule (including the king of Osrhoene),¹³⁵ Parthian hostages at Rome, Roman administrators in Syria and the Roman imperial court at Rome. Connections like these were not just personal and political, but involved the movement of Parthian nobles across the border and into the heart of the Roman Empire.

In 114, Trajan invaded and annexed Armenia.¹³⁶ Either in the same year or the next, he moved down from Armenia to the Parthian headquarters at Nisibis

at a distance of four *schoinoi*, lies Bambycê, which is also called Edessa and Hierapolis, where the Syrian goddess Atargatis is worshipped.) For the geographical context of the passage, see Chapter 4; for a discussion of the Euphrates route, see Chapter 6.

132 Tac. *Ann.* 6.31. The first hostage released died in Syria (Tac. *Ann.* 6.32), but the plan continued with a second, Tiridates.

133 Initial success: Tac. *Ann.* 6.37. Ultimate failure: Tac. *Ann.* 6.42–4; Joseph. *AJ* 18.100. Tacitus (*Ann.* 6.32) reports intrigue by Artabanus against the pretender and his allies.

134 Tac. *Ann.* 12.10–14; Bivar (2000) 76–78; Ross (2001) 10; Sommer (2005) 234–35; Edwell (2008) 16–17.

135 Abgar of Osrhoene was definitely involved in 49 CE. The route of the invasion directly through Osrhoene argues strongly for his involvement in 35 CE as well.

136 Dio 68.19–20, Moses Khorenats'i 2.55; Bivar (2000) 87–88.

and conquered northern Mesopotamia.¹³⁷ The local rulers, including Abgar of Osrhoene, joined him or were compelled to do so.¹³⁸ In 116, having wintered in Antioch, Trajan invaded along the Euphrates route, seized Babylonia, received the submission of Attambelos v of Mesene (Characene) at the head of the Arabian Gulf, and crowned a Parthian client king.¹³⁹ Trajan established two provinces, called Armenia and Mesopotamia, but the conquered cities immediately revolted. Abgar may have been reluctant to support the Romans. He had delayed meeting Trajan until Roman forces controlled all his neighbours and Trajan himself was marching towards Edessa.¹⁴⁰ Edessa was among the cities that rebelled in 116; it was captured and burned when the rebellion was crushed.¹⁴¹ Abgar died in those rebellions. For two years, Edessa was occupied by Roman troops.¹⁴² The original Parthian king Osroes was able to recover his lost territory, although the Parthian king crowned by Trajan may have maintained control of the Mesopotamian Borderland for several more years.¹⁴³ Trajan himself apparently planned a further campaign to recover the territory, but he fell ill and died while returning to Rome.

137 Lightfoot (1990) 117–20; Bivar (2000) 88; Ross (2001) 30–33. On the source and dating difficulties posed by Trajan's campaign, see Griffin (2000b) 123–24.

138 Dio 68.18, 68.21. Sommer (2010). Other local rulers who joined Trajan included Mannus ὁ τῆς Ἀραβίας τῆς πλησιοχώρου (Dio 68.21–22. Probably Ma'nu of Singhara, Ross (2001) 34); Sporakes, phylarch of Anthemusia (Dio 68.21); Manisaros (Of Gordyene? Dio 68.22.1: καὶ τοῦ Μανισάρου πρέσβεις ὑπέρ. εἰρήνης διὰ τὸ τὸν Ὀρρόην ἐπιστρατεύειν αὐτῷ πέμψαντος καὶ τῆς τε Ἀρμενίας καὶ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας ἐαλωκυίας ἀποστῆναι ἐτοιμῶς ἔχοντος); Mebarsapes, king of Adiabene (Dio 68.22.2: καὶ τὸν Μάννον ὑπώπτευν ἄλλως τε καὶ ὅτι συμμαχίαν Μηβαρσάπῃ τῷ τῆς Ἀδιαβηνῆς βασιλεῖ πέμψας πᾶσαν αὐτὴν ὑπὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀπεβελήκει). The relationship between these rulers is unclear: Gawlikowski (1998) 422 raises the possibility that Ma'nu and Sporakes could have been clients of Abgar.

139 Dio 68.26.4–30. Lightfoot (1990) 120–21; Bivar (2000) 89–90.

140 Dio 68.21; Ross (2001) 34; Millar (1993) 102.

141 Dio 68.30.1–2: “μαθὼν δὲ ταῦτα τὸν τε Λούσιον καὶ τὸν Μάξιμον [2] ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀφεστηκότας ἔπεμψε. καὶ οὗτος μὲν ἀπέθανεν ἡττηθεὶς μάχῃ, Λούσιος δὲ ἄλλα τε πολλὰ κατῴρωσε καὶ τὴν Νίσιβιν ἀνέλαβε, τὴν τε Ἑδεσσαν 3 ἐξεπολιόρκησε καὶ διέφθειρε καὶ ἐνέπρησεν. ἄλλω δὲ καὶ ἡ Σελεύκεια πρὸς τε Ἑρκεῖον Κλάρου καὶ πρὸς Ἰουλίῳ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ [3] ὑποστρατήγων, καὶ ἑκαύθη.” (When [Trajan] learned of the revolt, he sent Lucius and Maximus against the rebels. [2] The latter was defeated in battle and perished; but Lucius, in addition to many other successes, recovered Nisibis, and besieged and captured Edessa, which he sacked and burned. Seleucia was also captured by Erucius Clarus and Julius Alexander, lieutenants, and was burned.) Loeb trans.

142 Ross thinks it more likely that he died defending his new alliance with Trajan than opposing the still powerful Roman forces in the area. Trajan's Parthian appointee retaining control in northern Mesopotamia: Ross (2001) 34–35; Bivar (2000) 92–93.

143 Trajan's provinces: Lightfoot (1990) 121–24. Rebellion: Lightfoot (1990) 124; Bivar (2000) 90–91. Despite an attempt on his return, Trajan was never able to capture Hatra, Bivar (2000) 91–92; Birley (2000) 134.

There are no extant geographical descriptions of Trajan's short-lived province of Mesopotamia. While Ptolemy describes the world at around this time, his Mesopotamia is a geographical region not an administrative area. Despite sharing a name, the two spaces were not collocated. Ptolemy's geographical region was bounded by the Taurus, the Tigris, the Euphrates, and the Naarmalcha canal. Trajan's province probably included northern Mesopotamia from the border of Osrhoene to the Tigris, and down the Khabur River to the Euphrates. It would have definitely included Nisibis and Singara, and perhaps Amida and Constantina. A Roman milestone dating to 116 CE was found near Singara on the road to Nisibis.¹⁴⁴ Epigraphic and numismatic evidence shows that Dura Europos also was briefly under Roman control, but it is not clear whether it was under the jurisdiction of the governor of Syria or Mesopotamia;¹⁴⁵ it was attached to Syria after it was conquered later in the second century.¹⁴⁶ The southeast boundary of the province may have been the territory of Hatra, which Trajan failed to conquer. Osrhoene also remained an independent client kingdom beyond the direct administration of a Roman governor.

For the next fifty years, factions connected to Roman and Parthian networks squabbled for control of Osrhoene.¹⁴⁷ A succession of local kings backed by pro-Roman or pro-Iranian parties ruled the kingdom until the capture of Edessa by Lucius Verus. Numismatic evidence shows a king Ma'nu, who identifies himself as ΜΑΝΝΟΣ ΦΙΛΟΠΟΜΑ[ΙΟΣ], minting coins with Roman figures and Greek legends, as well as a king Wael minting coins with Parthian figures and Syriac legends.¹⁴⁸ These kings must have had networks of contact and support within the respective empires. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* relates that Ma'nu was driven out of Edessa and into the Roman Empire, probably by a Parthian intervention that placed Wael on the throne.¹⁴⁹ Ma'nu seems to have regained his throne when Lucius Verus invaded.¹⁵⁰

144 *AE* (1927), no. 161.

145 Edwell (2008) 115; Millar (1993) 102; Hopkins (1979) 68. A document found at Dura-Europos shows that the city was back in Parthian hands by 121 CE.

146 Millar (1993) 102. Probably because of strong pre-existing connections to Palmyra. On Trajan's campaign opening the Euphrates to Palmyrene influence, see Edwell (2008) 21.

147 Ross (2001) 36–37; Sommer (2010) 221–22.

148 Coins depicting Vologaeses IV on the obverse and “Wael the King” (وَالِدُ الْمَلِكِ) on the reverse: Hill (1965) 91–92, nos. 1–3 (Wael); Ross (2001) 36; Millar (1993) 112. Coins either reading “Ma'nu the King” (مَنْوُ الْمَلِكِ) or depicting members of the Antonine dynasty and marked ΜΑΝΝΟΣ ΦΙΛΟΠΟΜΑ[ΙΟΣ]: Hill (1965) 92–93, nos. 5–9 (Ma'nu); Ross (2001) 36; Sommer (2005) 236–38; Millar (1993) 112.

149 Ross (2001) 36.

150 *BMC Arabia* p. xcvi.

Lucius Verus managed his war against Parthia from Antioch.¹⁵¹ In 165 or 166, he sent Avidius Cassius through Osrhoene where he restored Ma'nu Φιλορωμαίος to Edessa, down the Euphrates where he recaptured Dura-Europos and other Euphrates fortresses, and into Babylonia where he sacked Ctesiphon.¹⁵² Roman control now seems to have extended to a line roughly from the Jebel Sinjar down the Khabur to Dura Europus.¹⁵³ This line was a route following a fertile strip between a major administrative and population centre in the north (Nisibis) and an important fortress and Palmyrene trading post in the south (Dura Europus). The political organisation of the new territory is unclear.¹⁵⁴ We know that Dura was added to the province of Syria. Osrhoene was still held by the Abgarids of Edessa, although Roman influence had increased and probably included permanent garrisons.¹⁵⁵ A collection of inscriptions found at Sumatar Harabesi near Edessa seem to show a new religious centre aimed at extending Edessan control over *Arab*, a region to the east of the kingdom.¹⁵⁶ Verus installed an unknown number of garrisons from Osrhoene to Adiabene, including one at Nisibis, but there is no evidence that Lucius Verus restored the Trajanic province of Mesopotamia. Evidence for these garrisons is indirect. The kings of Edessa and Adiabene defended their attack on Nisibis in 194 on the grounds that the Roman soldiers there had supported Pescennius Niger, then governor of Syria.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, Dio reports that the kings of Osrhoene and Adiabene demanded the removal of other Roman garrisons which existed in their territories.¹⁵⁸ Ross calls the Roman presence in northern Mesopotamia a state of *de facto* annexation.¹⁵⁹ However, the scarcity of administrative details are a problem. If there was a basis in truth to the claim that the garrison in Nisibis supported Niger, then we might expect that these garrisons fell under

151 Dio 71.1.3; SHA *Marcus* 8.9; *Verus* 5.8.

152 Dio 71.2.2; Edwell (2008) 23–26; Bivar (2000) 93. Edessa: Dio 71.2.1. Ctesiphon: Dio 71.2.3; but note Ball's caution: "The ease with which the Romans claimed to have taken Ctesiphon virtually as a matter of course during so many of their Parthian campaigns, but without and long-term effect, makes one suspect the sources somewhat, or even whether it was actually taken", (2000) 17, n. 47.

153 Bivar (2000) 94.

154 Ross (2001) 37–39; Millar (1993) 113.

155 Dio 75.1.3: "οὐ μέντοι οὔτε τὰ τεῖχη ἃ ἡρήκεσαν ἐκλιπεῖν οὔτε φρουροὺς λαβεῖν ἤθελον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἐξαχθῆναι ἐκ τῆς χώρας ἤξiouν." (Yet they were unwilling either to abandon the forts that they had captured or to receive garrisons, but actually demanded the removal from their country of such garrisons as still remained.) Loeb trans.

156 Ross (2001) 39–43; Drijvers (1972).

157 Dio 75.1.2–3.

158 Dio 75.1.3.

159 Ross (2001) 38.

his authority as governor of Syria. However, they may have been organised separately under an officer who sided with Niger. Nor do we know their precise purpose, activities, or what influence they had or were intended to have on the cities in which they were stationed. Our only geographical source from this time is the *Antonine Itinerary*. This document (or collection of documents) ends in the east with a dense cluster of routes connecting Edessa to Syria.¹⁶⁰ Neither Nisibis nor any sites in Osrhoene further east than Edessa appear in the text. The *Itinerary* certainly gives the impression that Edessa and Osrhoene were a well-integrated part of the Roman Near East.

The reign of Septimius Severus saw the end of Osrhoene as a borderland kingdom and the establishment of the provincial organisation which would remain until the end of our period. Severus disregarded the claim by Osrhoene and Adiabene that they had been acting in his interests in attacking Nisibis in 194 and invaded northern Mesopotamia immediately after his victory over Niger at Issus in the same year.¹⁶¹ The Parthians seem not to have been involved in this first of Septimius Severus' eastern campaigns.¹⁶² They were certainly involved in 197/8, however, when Severus crossed the Euphrates and marched at least as far south as Ctesiphon, which he sacked, and as far east as Hatra, which he did not.¹⁶³ As Trajan had done, Severus now organised northern Mesopotamia into the Roman provincial framework in the form of two new provinces called Osrhoena and Mesopotamia. The composition of these provinces is unclear, although it seems clear that Abgar VIII retained his throne.¹⁶⁴ It has generally been accepted that Osrhoena was composed and named from former territory of Abgarid Osrhoene. A milestone found 48 *milia passuum* to the west and the presence of the *colonia* established at Carrhae to the south give a general sense of the size of Abgar's kingdom.¹⁶⁵ However, it has been suggested that Osrhoena may have been created from the territory of rival principalities rather than that of the still-reigning Abgar, and may have been named Osrhoena "to show imperial appreciation of Abgar's friendship, by styling neighbouring territories after Edessa's traditional royal name, and simultaneously [as] a shrewd means of presenting the dichotomy between

160 The *Antonine Itinerary* and this Edessan network is discussed in Chapter 6.

161 Ross (2001) 47–48.

162 Dio reports that they were dissuaded by bad omens (75.3.1) but internal issues of some sort seem more likely, Bivar (2000) 94.

163 Millar (1993) 121; Edwell (2008) 26; Ball (2000) 18. Ball suggests that the ease of seizing Ctesiphon was because Severus had launched a surprise attack during a truce.

164 Sommer (2005) 240–41; Ross (2001) 46–53. On Septimius' treatment of Abgar as a loyal subject king: Gawlikowski (1998) 423.

165 Ross (2001) 50–51.

royal and provincial lands as a bipartite imperial unity.”¹⁶⁶ Regardless of who administered the territory before Rome, an equestrian *procurator* now administered a province named Osrhoena.¹⁶⁷ Further east, an equestrian *praefectus* now governed a new province of Mesopotamia, which was probably similar in area to the Trajanic province and included the new *coloniae* of Nisibis, Singara and Reshaina.¹⁶⁸ In 212/213, Caracalla abolished the Abgarid kingdom and incorporated it into the province of Osrhoena as a *colonia*.¹⁶⁹ The provinces of Osrhoena and Mesopotamia suffered several Sasanian invasions over the subsequent centuries, but the division of the geographical area of northern Mesopotamia between the two administrative regions lasted until the time of the *Exposito* and Ammianus.

3.3 *The Stage of Empire*

In 224 CE, the son of a local ruler in Persis defeated the last Parthian king and instituted a new dynasty.¹⁷⁰ By 229, Ardashir had added Babylonia to his new Sasanid Empire and was campaigning against a branch of the Arsacid family in Armenia.¹⁷¹ Hatra and Nisibis successfully repelled attacks, but the less heavily fortified places in Mesopotamia suffered from Sasanian raids.¹⁷² This brought Severus Alexander to the East to command a three-pronged attack against the new empire. In 231, one army was sent through Armenia against Media, another down the Euphrates against Babylonia, while the emperor led the third

166 A suggestion attributed to Olivier Hekster in Kaizer (2003) 290–291 (attribution in n. 18). The suggestion that the creation of the province did not come at the expense of the Abgarid kingdom had previously been made, but without the rationale for the curious naming: Gawlikowski (1998) 423–24.

167 Millar (1993) 125.

168 Millar (1993) 125–26, 143–44; Andrade (2013) 319.

169 Dio 77.12.1^a–1². *P. Dura* 1 of 243 CE notes the “liberation of Antoniana Edessa Colonia Metropolis” 31 years prior, that is, in 213 (Drijvers and Healey (1999) 240; Sartre (2005) 344 with n. 6). This refers to the annexation and probably the status of *colonia* as well; *metropolis* may have come later. By the mid-third century, Edessa had become “Edessa Antoniana Colonia Metropolis Aurelia Alexandria”; Ross ((2001) 57–63, esp. 59) argues that these titles were added in stages. Sommer (2005) 241–43; Millar (1993) 144.

170 On the rise of Ardashir and the establishment of the Sasanian Empire, see Dio 79.1.1–2; 4.4–5; 80.3.1–2; Dignas and Winter (2007) 18–19; Sartre (2005) 344; Daryaee (2009) 3–4; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 9–15; Pourshariati (2008) 33–59.

171 Edwell (2008) 150; Ghodrat-Dizaji (2007) 87–88. Bivar describes the Parthian resistance in Babylonia as a counter-revolution, Bivar (2000) 96. Armenia: Dio 80.3.3; Zonaras 12.15; Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, 2.71–3; Edwell (2008) 155–56.

172 Hatra: Dio 80.3.2; Edwell (2008) 153–55. Nisibis and Mesopotamia: Herodian 6.2.5; Zonaras 12.15; Edwell (2008) 156–61. The unstable conditions in Mesopotamia resulted in unrest, mutinies and revolts, including at Edessa. These were not so much against Roman control but against the specific emperor, Herodian 6.4.7.

through northern Mesopotamia.¹⁷³ The Romans were victorious in Media but were defeated in Mesopotamia. With both sides facing difficulties elsewhere, a truce was arranged. Severus Alexander claimed to have reconquered the lands between the rivers;¹⁷⁴ indeed, epigraphic evidence shows that Rome still controlled the area around Singara in 231/2 and probably had outposts as far as the Tigris.¹⁷⁵ Roman troops were also present and dedicating inscriptions at Hatra in the late 230s, before the city was captured by the Sasanian Persians around 240.¹⁷⁶

The middle decades of the third century saw successful campaigns waged in both directions across Mesopotamia. In 238/9, the Sasanians attacked Mesopotamia once more, this time under the crown prince Shapur.¹⁷⁷ He captured a number of cities in Mesopotamia and Syria, including Hatra, which was depopulated and destroyed in 240.¹⁷⁸ Dura-Europos came under attack but was probably not captured.¹⁷⁹ At Edessa, the Abgarid monarchy briefly returned between 238 and 242, probably to see to the city's defence.¹⁸⁰ The Roman emperor Gordian III responded with a successful campaign in 243, but he was killed in battle against Shapur near Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 244.¹⁸¹ Philip the Arab was proclaimed emperor and agreed to pay 500,000 denarii and ongoing tribute.¹⁸² However, he seems to have broken the treaty immediately and campaigned in Mesopotamia to recover territory lost or conceded to Shapur.¹⁸³ In 252, Shapur attacked up the Euphrates, capturing several cities along the

173 Herodian 6.5–6; Zonaras 12.15.14–22. For a detailed analysis of the campaign, see Edwell (2008) 161–67.

174 SHA *Sev. Alex.* 56.6: “terras interamnanas, Mesopotamiae scilicet”.

175 Millar (1993) 128–29.

176 Oates (1955); Sartre (2005) 345–47. On the possible alliance between Rome and the last king of Hatra: Sartre (2000) 509–11.

177 Edwell (2008) 167–69.

178 SKZ 10–17 = *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*; for the text, see Maricq (1958); Huyse (1999); discussion at Edwell (2008) 87–91 Hatra: Millar (1993) 150–51; Edwell (2008) 153–55 and references in n. 70.

179 Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 32.

180 Gawlikowski (1998) 424–27; Sommer (2010) 223–24; Sartre (2005) 344–45.

181 The Greco-Roman historical tradition generally fails to mention the battle and ascribes Gordian's death to treachery at the hands of his successor Philip. For the campaign and its end, see Edwell (2008) 169–73; Sartre (2005) 347; Daryaee (2009) 6–7; Ross (2001) 21; Ball (2000) 22–23. Sources: Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 35–45.

182 SKZ 9–10; Zosimus (3.32.4) says that Philip did not concede territory; Zonaras (12.19) says he conceded Armenia and Mesopotamia; Edwell (2008) 173–81 discusses the terms of the treaty.

183 Edwell (2008) 175–79.

river and in northern Syria, including Antioch.¹⁸⁴ Shapur's third campaign, in 260, resulted in the capture of many more cities in Syria, Commagene, Cilicia and Cappadocia, including the final fall of Dura-Europus. At a battle between Carrhae and Edessa, the emperor Valerian was captured.¹⁸⁵

In the dynastic weakness of the third century, a certain Septimius Odainathos, a native Palmyrene whose family had held Roman citizenship since Septimius Severus, rose to power in Palmyra as a militarily active ally of Rome.¹⁸⁶ Following Valerian's capture, Odainathos, now essentially the ruler of Palmyra, "defended Syria, recovered Mesopotamia" and campaigned as far as Ctesiphon, nominally as a general of Gallienus.¹⁸⁷ In 267/68, Odainathos and Hairan, his son and heir designate, were murdered at Emesa; Odainathos' wife Zenobia assumed power as regent of their other sons. By the end of 270, Zenobia had seized control of the Roman provinces from Egypt to northern Syria, founded an eponymous fortress on the Euphrates, and had her oldest son Vaballathos take imperial titles.¹⁸⁸ Two years later, Aurelian defeated the Palmyrenes in several battles, seized Antioch, Emesa and Palmyra itself, and took Zenobia to Rome to be led in his triumph.¹⁸⁹ Palmyra survived, but a legion was stationed near the city after rumours of unrest. The subsequent reduction in Palmyrene independence hampered their liminal position as

184 SKZ 10–19. Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 49–56; Edwell (2008) 181–98; Daryaei (2009) 7.

185 SKZ 19–37. On the fall of Dura: Sartre (2005) 348–50; Hopkins (1979) 242–49, 262–64. Re-discovery and excavation: Hopkins (1979) for general account and guide to main sources. Recent excavations: Leriche and Al Mahmoud (1994); Leriche and Gelin (1997); Leriche et al. (2004). Sources on the capture of Valerian: Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 58–65.

186 The main work on the Palmyrene "Empire" is Hartmann (2001), but see also Sommer (2005) 159–70. For a reconstruction of the earlier career of Odainathos, see de Blois (1975); Gawlikowski (2010). De Blois (p.14) argues that Odainathos campaigned with Valerian in 259 to reopen Palmyrene trade routes with Characene, closed by Ardashir ca. 230. Sartre suggests that citizenship may have been awarded for services rendered against local adherents of Pescennius Niger in 194; Sartre (2005) 351–53. Andrade (2013) 330–33 discusses the representational strategies Odainathos used to balance his Roman and Palmyrene roles.

187 Eutropius 9.10: "Defensa Syria, recepta Mesopotamia usque ad Ctesiphontem Odenathus penetravit"; Hartmann (2001) 162–241; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 71–77. Aurelius Victor (*Lib. Caes.* 33.3) wrote that the Sasanians still controlled Mesopotamia while Zenobia held the East. For an account of third-century Palmyra, Odainathos' possible embassy to Shapur to arrange a trade agreement with the Sasanians and his military campaigns, see Smith (2013) 175–78. Gawlikowski (2010) argues that Odainathos and his son took the title "king of kings" as a direct challenge to Shapur before their campaign against Ctesiphon.

188 Smith (2013) 178–81; Hartmann (2001) 242–351; Andrade (2013) 334–39; Sartre (2005) 355–57; sources Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 80–92.

189 Hartmann (2001) 352–94; Sartre (2005) 357–58; sources Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 92–109. The sources differ on Zenobia's ultimate fate.

controllers of the desert trade routes between Syria and Babylonia. Traffic moved north to the Mesopotamian routes over the following century, reducing the importance of the city.

The end of the third century saw a formalisation of the relationship between Rome and Sasanian Persia. In 283, the Roman emperor Carus took advantage of Sasanian dynastic difficulties and raided into Babylonia, seizing Seleucia-Ctesiphon, where he died.¹⁹⁰ Carus' successor, Diocletian, restored Roman fortunes in the Mesopotamian Borderland. Galerius, Diocletian's Caesar, was defeated by Narsē in a battle near Carrhae but subsequently defeated Narsē in Armenia and captured his camp, including many of his family.¹⁹¹ This defeat forced Narsē to negotiate, and in 297 or 298, a formal division of territory, based on the line of the Tigris, was agreed.¹⁹² Diocletian was free to restructure the eastern frontier defences.

Forty years later, tensions broke out over Armenia once more. By now Constantine's support of Christianity and interest in Christians within the Sasanid realm had added a religious dimension to the conflict.¹⁹³ In particular, the growth of Christianity in Armenia and Mesopotamia was an ideological alignment of those border regions with the Romans. Shortly after Constantius II had become emperor, Shapur II besieged Nisibis three times (in 337/8, 346 and 350), defeated the Roman forces in a night battle at Singara, and took some cities and forts along the frontier; however, he achieved no major territorial gains before trouble in the eastern provinces of his empire required his presence.¹⁹⁴ In 359, Shapur returned with Chionite/Kidirite allies from Central Asia and attacked again.¹⁹⁵ This time Shapur bypassed Nisibis, aiming for Syria, but found the Euphrates in flood and impassable and turned north to besiege Amida, which was left in ruins.¹⁹⁶ Singara and Bezabde were also captured, and the

190 Carus: Dignas and Winter (2007) 26; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 112–16. Sasanian dynastic problems: Daryaee (2009) 12.

191 Potter (2004) 292–93; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 125–38.

192 Petrus Patricius, fr. 14 *FGrH* 4, p. 189. Dignas and Winter (2007) 26–32, 122–30. See also the Paikuli Inscription erected by Narsē which mentions the peace (but not the terms) and the supporters of the King, Skjaervø and Humbach (1983). This treaty and its implications for Nisibis and the Mesopotamian Borderland is discussed in Chapter 7.

193 Eusebius *vita Const.* 4.8–13. Dignas and Winter (2007) 216–21; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 150–52.

194 Dignas and Winter (2007) 32–34, 88–90; Daryaee (2009) 17; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 164–209.

195 Amm. Marc. 18.7. Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 211–30.

196 Amm. Marc. 19.1–8.

latter was in turn besieged twice by Constantius. After a brief stalemate between Shapur on the Tigris and Constantius at Edessa, both sides withdrew.¹⁹⁷

After Constantius' death, Julian assembled his forces and in 361 marched down the Euphrates for Ctesiphon.¹⁹⁸ Failing to capture it, Julian began to march back up the Tigris towards Gordyene with the Persian army harassing their march and burning the region's crops, but died of a wound taken in a battle during the retreat. With morale in the army low because of Julian's death and the lack of food, the new emperor Jovian came to terms with Shapur.¹⁹⁹ In 363, Jovian surrendered the territory conceded by Narsē 65 years before as well as several important strongholds including the frontier cities of Nisibis and Singara.²⁰⁰ Nisibis was evacuated and once again became an stronghold of an Iranian empire as it had been under the Parthians.

4 Who "Made" Mesopotamia?

Chronologically, my study area is defined by Roman victories in the first century BCE and Sasanian victories in the fourth century CE. It begins with the arrival of Roman power in the Near East, especially the direct control of kingdoms and cities brought about by the campaigns of Lucullus and Pompey against Mithridates of Pontus and Tigranes of Armenia. This highlights the Roman and geographical perspectives of my project. A welcome scholarly trend of recent decades seeks to treat ancient sources on their own merits as literary works rather than as conduits for information about the ancient world beyond the text or in search of some more "pure" lost text.²⁰¹ The geographical sources which survive from the Roman imperial period must be treated as products of their time. While they are full of Hellenistic information, they were constructed within the social and political conditions of the Roman Empire and cannot be entirely divorced from that context. Moreover, these sources are not impartial observations. They are narratives written by authors with their own im-

197 Amm. Marc. 21.13. On the role of Nisibis as an advance base and command centre: Ross (2001) 21.

198 The major narrative is that of Ammianus Marcellinus, 23–25. For additional sources, see Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 231–74. For the campaign in brief, see Potter (2004) 514–19.

199 Amm. Marc. 25.7.

200 Text and analysis of the treaty of 363: Dignas and Winter (2007) 131–34. The treaty is discussed further in Chapter 7.

201 For example, Burliga (2013) on Arrian, Kelly (2008) on Ammianus. This attitude underlies much of the recent revival of interest in Strabo and Pliny, for example, Dueck (2000); Dueck et al. (2005); Murphy (2004).

PLICIT and explicit views and preferences which participate in the creation and reiteration of elite literary culture in their own social and political contexts.²⁰²

My period ends with Jovian's defeat by Shapur II in 363 CE and the subsequent treaty which ceded Nisibis to the Sasanian Persians. Between the *Antonine Itinerary*, the *Peutinger Table*, Ammianus Marcellinus, and the *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*, the fourth century was comparatively rich in geographical texts. Although Strabo and Pliny provide our two most detailed narrative descriptions of the area and thus are frequently the focus and starting point of the subjects I examine within this investigation, extending the chronological scope to include these fourth-century texts offers an fascinating contrast between the earlier and later texts which allows a more varied selection of perspectives on the Mesopotamian Borderland. In particular, this extended scope allows us some perspective into the changes that took place in the third century for which we mostly lack good evidence in geography, as in history. Moreover, the treaty of 363 can be seen as a conceptual end to Roman eastward expansion. Thereafter, Roman and Persian power was largely in balance. The boundaries between them became more rigid, particularly in the military and ideological spheres.²⁰³ At the scale presented by the Roman imperial geographical writers, borderland interactions are most visible when the borderland is more fluid and mobile. In this state, the effect of imperial policies and geographical changes on smaller polities and the description of those polities can be seen.

Five Roman imperial geographical writers form the focus of this book: Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Claudius Ptolemy, the *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*, and Ammianus Marcellinus. These five sources span the chronological period of my work and include examples of scientific and descriptive geography, a variety of scales and degrees of selectivity, and both planar and linear conceptions of space. Most importantly, they all describe the Mesopotamian Borderland in ways that illuminate that space and its place in the Roman imagination.

Strabo was born into an elite Pontic family in Amasia around the middle of the first century BCE, just after the Roman conquest.²⁰⁴ He received a Hellenistic

202 On the dangers of decontextualised reading, see Hartog (1988) 4–5.

203 Dignas and Winter (2007) provides a relatively brief, but thorough, examination of relations between the two empires between the third and seventh century. See Greatrex and Lieu (2002) for a selection of relevant primary sources.

204 Potheary (1997) 245 argues (against the traditional birth date of 63/64 BCE proposed by Neise in the 19th century) that Strabo's birth date cannot be narrowed beyond in a window from 65–50 BCE. For more detail on Strabo's biography, see Roller (2014) 1–16; Lindsay (2005); Dueck (2000) 1–30; Clarke (1997); Drijvers (1998) 279; Diller (1975); Richards (1941).

education in Asia Minor and Rome and circulated among the intellectual elite of the Roman Empire.²⁰⁵ Although his major work was probably a forty-seven-book continuation of Polybius' history, now lost except for a handful of fragments,²⁰⁶ he is best known for his seventeen-book *Geography* written late in his life (around 18–24 CE) from notes compiled over his lifetime.²⁰⁷ This was a work of descriptive, rather than scientific, geography. Strabo intended to provide geographic and ethnographic descriptions of space with practical use as opposed to the scientific measurement and mathematical calculation of space practiced by many others in the geographical tradition.²⁰⁸ The *Geography* describes the world as it was known to contemporary Roman thought (including chapters on many areas outside the Roman world, even those as far distant as India and Scandinavia), in particular one of the earliest and most detailed surviving descriptions of the geography of the Mesopotamian Borderland. The organisational principle of his work was the Roman imperial ideology of universal rule – the world as organised by Roman power.²⁰⁹

Gaius Plinius Secundus (23–79 CE) came from a north Italian equestrian family, served several terms in the army and held at least one provincial procuratorship, probably rising to prominence under the patronage of Vespasian and his advisor Licinius Mucianus.²¹⁰ He wrote several works over the course of his life; the last was the thirty-seven-book *Natural History* (*Historia Naturalis*) written under the Flavians and finished around 77 CE.²¹¹ The *Natural History* was constructed as a catalogue of the world arrayed before the future emperor

205 Dueck (2000) 9–12; Clarke (1997) 99–101, 108; Nicolet (1991) 73. Strabo had close connections with Rome (including visits 6.2.6, 8.6.23) and may have become a Roman citizen: Dueck (2000) 7, 87–88, 96, 130–144; Potheary (1999).

206 *FGrH* 9 1; Clarke (1997) 93; Richards (1941) 85–86.

207 The dating of his *Geography* is based on a specific reference to a time of writing (33 years after the surrender of the Alpine tribes to Tiberius in 15 BCE: 4.6.9) and the latest dateable event (the death of Juba, king of Mauretania, in 23 CE: 17.3.7). Furthermore, Dueck argues that his style of composition (well organised and with frequent cross-references) indicates a relatively short span of writing: Dueck (1999); Dueck (2000) 146–50; Potheary (2002). For earlier scholarship on this issue, see Drijvers (1998) 279 n. 3. An example is Syme (1995); Lindsay (1997). For the textual history of the *Geography*, see Roller (2014) 28 n. 83; Diller (1975).

208 Dueck (2000) 53–62; Dilke (1985) 62–65.

209 Strabo was interested in the relationship between geography and state power: 1.1.17–18. Nicolet (1991); Engels (1999) 298–313; Ando (2000) 323–29; Clarke (1999) 210–28; Braund (2005).

210 For Pliny's biography, see Beagon (2005) 1–5; Beagon (1992) 1–6; Reynolds (1986); Syme (1969).

211 For a brief summary of Pliny and the geographical aspects of his work, see Dilke (1985) 66–71.

Titus and included a geographical account of the world (books 3–6). Pliny, like Strabo, is an author who is more often “consulted” than “read”.²¹² Pliny’s nephew called the *Historia Naturalis* a broad and learned work, no less varied than nature itself (“opus diffusum eriditum, nec minus varium quam ipsa natura”).²¹³ Accordingly, the scope of his work has led to many divergent scholarly threads, especially on Roman scientific thought and his encyclopaedic project.²¹⁴

Claudius Ptolemy seems to have been born around the beginning of the second century CE and began his scientific career in the mid-120s in or near Alexandria.²¹⁵ He probably lived until the last quarter of the second century. Even though he lived in an intellectual centre of the Roman world at the height of the Principate, Ptolemy was also part of a scientific tradition which was firmly linked to its Hellenistic predecessors.²¹⁶ His career began with astronomical research, the *Almagest*, a mathematical treatise on motion of heavenly bodies. Among his works was the *Geographike Hyphegesis* (*Manual of Geography*, or usually simply *Geography*), a comprehensive list of coordinate data for cities, towns, rivers, mountain ranges and other such geographical features by which one could draw a map.²¹⁷ The main body of the text was preceded by a theoretical section in which he identified and criticised his main source, Marinus of Tyre, and discussed the construction of an appropriate map projection to display the data he provided.

The *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* (often shortened to *Expositio Totius Mundi* or simply *Expositio*) is an anonymous text from the fourth century.²¹⁸

212 To borrow the phrasing of Gibson and Morello’s editorial preface, (2011) vii.

213 Pliny *Ep.* 3.5.6.

214 For example, the collections of French and Greenaway (1986) and Gibson and Morello (2011). See also Doody (2010) on the reception of his encyclopaedism, Murphy (2004) on the role of geography and ethnography in his imperialistic project, and Beagon (1992) 159–201 on his attitude towards agriculture and trade.

215 Berggren and Jones (2000) 17–20; Jones (2008).

216 Bagrow (1945) 331.

217 The best edition is now Stückelberger and Grasshoff (2006), with annotated German translation.

218 Rougé (1966) 9–26 established the terminus a quo as 347 CE and dated the text to 359/60 CE. An *ante quem* date can be determined from the only non-economic descriptors of the Mesopotamian section. *Exposito* 22 clearly marks Mesopotamia as Roman territory (“Post hos nostra terra est”) and includes Nisibis and Amida as two of its important cities, both of which resist Persian attacks (“habentes moenia inclita, bello semper virtutem Persarum dissolvunt”). Following Julian’s disastrous campaign against Ctesiphon, Jovian handed Nisibis over the Sasanids in the peace of 363 CE; the *Expositio* must antedate this concession. Furthermore, if we accept the emendation of the doubled Edessa to Amida (see Chapter 3), the text must antedate the fall of the city to the Sasanians in 359/360.

It was originally written in Greek, but survives now as two Latin copies: the *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* by which it is now known and a slightly less complete copy called the *Descriptio Totius Mundi*.²¹⁹ It describes the Roman world in a provincial structure and some of the non-Roman world as a list of adjacent tribes and regions with varying levels of description.²²⁰

The traditional biography for Ammianus Marcellinus has him born around 330 CE to an elite Antiochene family, becoming *protector domesticus* to the *magister equitum* Ursicinus in the early 350s, continuing his military career until 363 when he retired to write his history at Antioch and Rome.²²¹ He travelled extensively as an officer and private citizen and presented his *Res Gestae* to Theodosius in 389/390.²²² However, Kelly's recent study of Ammianus' literary techniques casts doubt on a positivist autobiographical reading the text, instead suggesting that we should read the *Res Gestae* as a self-consciously constructed personal memoir.²²³ The *Res Gestae* is a history of the Roman Empire from Nerva (96–98 CE) to the death of Valens at Adrianople (378 CE), based in part on his personal experiences. The extant text deals with 353–378 CE in 18 books (usually numbered 14–31)²²⁴ and provides a valuable eyewitness account of the warfare in Mesopotamia during the fourth-century.²²⁵ Ammianus included several geographical digressions in his work, including on the lands and ethnography of the Saracens, on the eastern provinces, and on Persia.²²⁶ Sundwall argues that Ammianus is "the best source" for an investigation into the oral and written traditions of Roman mental cartography.²²⁷

5 Outlining the Narrative

This book examines geographical representations of the Romano-Iranian borderland in northern Mesopotamia in order to answer two overarching

Woodman (1964) 61 dated the text slightly earlier (350–53) based on a note in Sinko's edition of the *Descriptio*, (1904) 566 n. 479.

219 Riese (1878) 104–26; Rougé (1966).

220 The non-Roman areas: *Expositio* 8–20.

221 Thompson (1947) 1–19; Rowell (1964) 15–29; Matthews (1989) 74–80.

222 Travel: Matthews (1989) 13–17. Presentation of *Res Gestae*: Matthews (1989) 8–9. Composition: Matthews (1989) 17–32.

223 Kelly (2008). See especially pp. 104–158 on the dangers of a biographical reading and pp. 31–103 on the nature of Ammianus' text as a literary history.

224 Although see Barnes (1998) who argues for a total of 36 books, with the first 18 missing.

225 Matthews (1989) 8–32; with the reservations of Kelly (2008) esp. 35–44.

226 Saracens: Amm. Marc. 14.4. Eastern provinces: Amm. Marc. 14.8. Persia: Amm. Marc. 23.6; Boeft et al. (1998) 129–31.

227 Sundwall (1996) 621–22.

questions: How did Roman geographers conceive of this borderland? How did they represent this space in written form to their respective audiences? In order to examine these questions, I have structured the book in two parts.

Part 1 (Chapters 2–5) examines the intellectual tradition within which these geographical texts were produced, addresses the contingent history of geographical representation, and examines the technical detail of how these spaces were constructed by narrative and language. Chapter 2 examines the different sources of knowledge from which the geographical writers construct their descriptions of the Mesopotamian Borderland and the different traditions within which those writers worked. Each writer placed a varying degree of weight on different means of acquiring knowledge. In particular, they addressed the dichotomy between second-hand knowledge obtained by hearing and reading and first-hand knowledge obtained by sight and personal experience. The sedimentary nature of geographic knowledge meant that each author relied on the former to a significant degree. While the geographic writers of the early Imperial period used Greek sources of the Hellenistic period to construct their geographical narratives, they all supplemented those Greek sources with Roman information and perspectives.

The five works discussed above (Strabo's *Geography*, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, Ptolemy's *Geography*, the *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* and Ammianus Marcellinus' *History*) each describe the space between and around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers at the limit of the Roman Empire in different ways and with different degrees of specificity. The next three chapters undertake a systematic examination of our main sources of geographical information on the Mesopotamian Borderland to show how the Roman imperial geographical writers named, defined and described the geographical area of the borderland. Chapter 3 addresses names and boundaries: what did the Roman imperial geographic writers mean when they wrote "Mesopotamia" and how did they delimit that space? Having defined the boundaries, Chapter 4 zooms in to examine the narrative techniques used to describe and divide the interior. Chapter 5 addresses the human geography of the borderland to show how the geographical writers used ethnonyms and ethnographic narrative techniques to relate the spaces within the Mesopotamian Borderland to the people with which they populated them.

Part 2 (Chapters 6 and 7) is concerned with how the Mesopotamian Borderland was represented as functioning in these texts. Chapter 6 focuses on the representation of the borderland as a space of inter-imperial commercial movement, especially in three long-established corridors of trade and mobility between Roman and Iranian spaces. Strabo's narrative of commercial movement on the Euphrates between Syria and Babylon emphasises inter-imperial contact and the activity of mobile pastoralists. Pliny's brief but

illuminating picture of Palmyra, and its connections between Babylonia and the Mediterranean, highlights the centres of contact which participated in their desert routes. The *Expositio Totius Mundi*'s representation of the fourth-century provinces of Mesopotamia and Osrhoena astride the northern route near the Taurus shows the pre-eminence of that route in the late empire, and particularly the importance that Nisibis attained as a focal point of inter-imperial activity. In all these cases, the representation of cross-border connections highlights the Mesopotamian Borderland's role as a space of inter-imperial movement.

The negotiation between Roman and Iranian power lies at the heart of the presentation of the Mesopotamian Borderland. Chapter 7 demonstrates how the Roman imperial geographic writers used their selection and presentation of material, historical comparanda, and treatment of imperial power and contemporary political relationships to place the Mesopotamian Borderland in relation to Roman power. At a local level, Roman power is represented in the geographical treatment of borderland polities like Commagene, Osrhoene, Nisibis and Palmyra. At an imperial level, Strabo establishes links between his Roman world and that of the Fertile Crescent by references to Alexander the Great, the Macedonian colonies of the Seleucid Empire, and contemporary political circumstances, namely the presence of the Parthian Empire.

The book ends with a discussion of how these narratives of the Mesopotamian Borderland articulated Rome's place in global world. The geographic writers placed the Mesopotamian Borderland in a "global" context through relations between the universal and the local. The Mesopotamian Borderland is represented as a frontier at the edge of a Roman world and as a globalising link between the Roman and Iranian worlds. The construction of the Mesopotamian Borderland in the geographical works of the Roman Empire illuminates the relationship between Rome and the Iranian Empires of the Arsacids and Sasanids as well as the Romans' understanding of their own place in a global world.

PART 1

Tradition and Narrative



Knowing

At the beginning of his description of Mesopotamia in book 6 of the *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder sets the tone for this part of the narrative with a focus on the Macedonian impact on Mesopotamian history:

All Mesopotamia belonged to the Assyrians, the population scattered in villages except for Babylon and Ninevah. The Macedonians gathered them together in cities because of the fertility of the soil.¹

Pliny conceived of the Assyrians as inhabiting a broad area including both upper and lower Mesopotamia and the plains on the eastern bank of the Tigris.² Here, Pliny uses *Assyrii* to describe the local Aramaic-speaking population whom he presents as scattered in villages and largely lacking cities prior to the arrival of the urbanising Macedonians. Seleucid rule favoured the exercise of royal power through the *polis* structures, but while there were several waves of urban foundation throughout the Hellenistic period, many of these “foundations” simply involved the establishment of Seleucid political structures in existing local settlements.³ Pliny’s brief and reductive description of the complex political and demographic processes of Mesopotamian settlement history prioritises the Macedonian urbanisation that would be modified and inherited by Roman provincial structures and was valued as a significant indicator of “civilisation” in Roman provincial ideology.⁴ The contrast Pliny draws between *Mesopotamia Assyriorum* and *Macedones* (NH 6.117) serves to place the role that Macedonian rulers played in the productivity of Mesopotamia squarely in the foreground.

1 Pliny, NH 6.117: “Mesopotamia tota Assyriorum fuit, vicatim dispersa praeter Babylona et Ninum. Macedones eam in urbes congregavere propter ubertatem soli.”

2 Pliny NH 5.86: “ab Assyriis originem trahens”. For the area which Pliny considered the Assyrians to inhabit, see Chapter 3.

3 For detailed discussion of Seleucid foundations and foundation practices, see Jones (1971); Cohen (2006); Cohen (2013); Kosmin (2014). For further discussion of the representation of such foundations in geographic writing, see Chapter 4.

4 On the importance of Hellenistic urbanisation to Roman provincial ideology, see Ando (2012). For pre-Hellenistic settlement history, see Liverani (1988); Fales (1990); Kühne (1995); Wilkinson et al. (1994); Wilkinson (1995); Wilkinson (2000); Wilkinson et al. (2005).

In highlighting the role of Macedonian colonisation and cultural influence in Mesopotamia, Pliny makes explicit what all the geographical sources display in various forms: the important role that Macedonian colonisation and control had in shaping the region that would become the Mesopotamian Borderland. The Hellenistic sources on which the Roman authors relied were partially responsible for this focus; these writers naturally prioritised the achievements of the culture to which they laid claim. Therefore, when the Romans came to consider themselves the heirs to that Hellenistic cultural heritage, they turned to those Hellenistic works to provide not just information about the world as understood by Hellenistic thinkers, but to lend a certain cultural authority to their own work. It is a mistake, however, to consider the authors of the Roman era as little more than imitators of their Hellenistic forebears. The geographical writers working in the context of the *ferox victor* were far from the passive recipients of their predecessors' *artes*.⁵

This chapter will show how those geographical writers, particularly Strabo and Pliny, drew on Hellenistic sources of knowledge and fashioned them into a Roman geography of Mesopotamia. The first half of this chapter examines the source methodology of Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy. I examine their attitudes towards personal, first-hand knowledge gathered through autopsy and literary, second-hand knowledge gathered through the study of earlier scholarship. Next, I investigate who their sources of geographical data were and how they identified and deployed them in their own work. Who and how the geographical writers explicitly cited provides a starting point from which to consider which sources they implicitly used for geographical material but did not name. The chapter ends with a discussion of the role of Greek and Roman traditions of spatial measurement. In this chapter, I do not aim at an exhaustive *Quellenforschung*, but rather to show the intellectual basis of these geographical works and, moreover, the modes and traditions of knowledge to which they appeal and from which they draw their authority. As we shall see, Hellenistic material plays a fundamental role in the construction of these Roman geographies, even when it is not explicitly acknowledged.

1 Strabo's Sources

Strabo was culturally Greek and explicitly placed himself in the Greek geographical tradition. He traced his intellectual lineage back to Homer, whom he

5 Horace, *Epist.* 2.156–157. For conscious Roman adoption and transformation of Greek knowledge in other cultural fields, see Habinek (1998); Sciarrino (2011); Cirucci (2013).

regarded as the first geographer.⁶ Strabo made extensive use of the Hellenistic geographic tradition, especially Eratosthenes, whom he spends much of his introduction criticising, Posidonius, himself a native Syrian from Apamea, and Artemidorus.⁷ Strabo's engagement with his predecessors is such that Romm called the *Geography* a "treasure-trove of the fragments of Hellenistic critical debate."⁸ Pothecary goes further: "Strabo is so enmeshed in the Greek culture of his day that he cannot struggle free of it: his way of looking at the world is subjectively determined by his immersion in the Greek culture of which he is so proud."⁹ There is a large degree of truth to such statements, but they should not obscure the fact that the geography Strabo constructed did not simply reflect a Greek understanding of the world. Strabo was also a Roman subject, perhaps even a citizen, who placed Rome and Roman power at the centre of his work and aimed for practical scholarship useful to contemporary politicians and generals.¹⁰ The boundaries between Strabo's reflections of Hellenism and

6 Dueck (2000) 31–40; Biraschi (2005); Roller (2014) 17–18; Strabo 1.1.2: "καὶ πρῶτον ὅτι ὁρθῶς ὑπειλήφαμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς καὶ οἱ πρὸ ἡμῶν, ὧν ἐστὶ καὶ Ἱππαρχος, ἀρχηγέτην εἶναι τῆς γεωγραφικῆς ἐμπειρίας Ὅμηρον." (First, both I and those before me, among whom is Hipparchus, assume correctly that Homer was the originator of the art of geography) Translation Roller (2014). Strabo 1.1.11: "Νυνὶ δὲ ὅτι μὲν Ὅμηρος τῆς γεωγραφίας ἤρξεν, ἀρκεῖται τὰ λεχθέντα. φανεροὶ δὲ καὶ οἱ ἐπακολουθήσαντες αὐτῷ ἄνδρες ἀξιόλογοι καὶ οἰκείοι φιλοσοφίας, ὧν τοὺς πρῶτους μεθ' Ὅμηρον δύο φησὶν Ἑρατοσθένης, Ἀναξίμανδρον τε Θαλοῦ γεγονότα γνώριμον καὶ πολίτην καὶ Ἑκαταῖον τὸν Μιλήσιον· τὸν μὲν οὖν ἐκδοῦναι πρῶτον γεωγραφικὸν πῖνακα, τὸν δὲ Ἑκαταῖον καταλιπεῖν γράμμα, πιστούμενον ἐκείνου εἶναι ἐκ τῆς ἄλλης αὐτοῦ γραφῆς." (Let what has now been said be sufficient, that Homer was the beginning of geography. His successors obviously were also notable men and familiar with learning. Eratosthenes says that the first two after Homer were Anaximander (a pupil and fellow-citizen of Thales) and Hecataeus of Miletus; that the former was the first to produce a geographical plan [γεωγραφικὸν πῖνακα], and Hecataeus left behind a treatise, believed to be his by reason of its similarity to his other writings.) Translation adapted from Roller (2014). Strabo is particularly critical of Eratosthenes' dismissal of Homer as a useful geographical source, Dueck (2000) 34.

7 Eratosthenes: 276–195 BCE; Posidonius: 135–51 BCE; Artemidorus: 2nd–1st C BCE. All three are discussed below (with references). Strabo names four geographers whom he deems worthy of engagement in philosophical terms: Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, Posidonius and Polybius (Strabo 1.2.1). On Hipparchus, see Dueck (2000) 58–59; Viedebant (1915); Dicks (1960); Neugebauer (1975) 274–77, 332–38; Hübner, 'Hipparchus [6]'; *BNP*. Strabo (3.5.7) defines Artemidorus as a layman in certain matters (ιδιώτης) but uses him for distances and measurements, Dueck (2000) 59–60.

8 Romm (1992) 197.

9 Pothecary (2005) 6. In examining Strabo's conscious treatment of Rome, we should not forget the structures of Greek knowledge and understanding within which he was working, Ando (2012).

10 The centrality of Roman power is evident throughout the books which describe areas controlled by Rome. Nicolet characterises Strabo as "un Grec d'Asie très représentatif de

of Roman imperial ideology thus bear investigation. This section begins with an examination of Strabo's attitude towards the acquisition and production of geographic knowledge. I will then discuss the specific sources he uses to construct his image of Mesopotamia and how he used them in his geographical narrative. These investigations will allow conclusions to be drawn about Strabo's geographical methods.

In book 2, Strabo discusses the acquisition of his geographical material. He begins by stating his credentials as a widely-travelled scholar:

Now I shall relate those parts of the land and sea I have visited myself and those parts where I have placed my trust in the words and writing of others. I have travelled towards the west from Armenia as far as the regions of Tyrrhenia opposite Sardinia, and towards the south from the Black Sea as far as the frontiers of Ethiopia. And you could not find anyone else among the geographers who has travelled over much more of the distances just mentioned than I; indeed, those exceeding me in the western part have not reached so much in the east, and those exceeding me in the eastern part, are behind in the western; and the same holds true concerning those parts towards the south and north.¹¹

Strabo divides his sources of knowledge into two categories: that gathered by personal observation (ἐπελθόντες αὐτοὶ) and that accepted through trust (πιστεύσαντες). He further divides this latter category between oral and written testimony (τοῖς εἰποῦσιν ἢ γράψασιν), perhaps granting equal weight to both. For geographical knowledge, personal observation required travel to observe the various parts of the world to be described. Accordingly, Strabo provides his credentials in this regard. He gives the extent of his travels in terms of the furthest

ces notables intellectuels, à la fois hellènes jusqu'au bout des ongles et tout à fait ralliés au nouveau pouvoir romain; mieux que cela: frottés aux cercles dirigeants, et précisément à ceux qui sont chargés d'administrer le vaste empire, voire d'en repousser les limites.", Nicolet (1988) 93. See also, Dueck (2000) 107–22; Roller (2014) 20–21. Strabo declares his practical purpose at 1.1.22–23 and throughout his work. On the question of Strabo's citizenship, for which there is no real evidence except for the apparent Latinity of his name, see Potheary (1999); Dueck (2000) 7–8; Roller (2014) 1–2.

- 11 Strabo 2.5.11: ἐροῦμεν δὴ τὴν μὲν ἐπελθόντες αὐτοὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ θαλάττης, περὶ ἧς δὲ πιστεύσαντες τοῖς εἰποῦσιν ἢ γράψασιν. Ἐπήλθομεν δὲ ἐπὶ δύσιν μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀρμενίας μέχρι τῶν κατὰ Σαρδόνια τόπων τῆς Τυρρηνίας, ἐπὶ μεσημβρίαν δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ Εὐξείνου μέχρι τῶν τῆς Αἰθιοπίας ὄρων· οὐδὲ τῶν ἄλλων δὲ οὐδὲ εἰς ἂν εὐρεθῇ τῶν γεωγραφησάντων πολὺ τι ἡμῶν μάλλον ἐπεληλυθὼς τῶν λεχθέντων διασθημάτων, ἀλλ' οἱ πλεονάσαντες περὶ τὰ δυσμικὰ μέρη τῶν πρὸς ταῖς ἀνατολαῖς οὐ τοσοῦτον ἥψαντο, οἱ δὲ περὶ τὰναντία τῶν ἐσπερίων ὑστέρησαν· ὁμοίως δ' ἔχει καὶ περὶ τῶν πρὸς νότον καὶ τὰς ἄρκτους.

region in each cardinal direction which he has visited: Armenia, Tyrrhenia (Etruria, Tuscany), the Black Sea (τὸ Ἐὐξείνου), the frontiers (ὄρων) of Ethiopia. References to autopsy within Strabo's text fall within these bounds. There has been much scholarly speculation on how widely Strabo travelled and observed the places of which he wrote.¹² His travels in the eastern Mediterranean seem to have been extensive, but there is no solid evidence that he visited Syria and none at all that he personally visited Mesopotamia or any place to the east of the Roman Empire. Strabo gives general bounds to his travel here, and alludes to personal visits to places within his text, but he did not consider it important to list or explicitly catalogue his travels. It was enough to claim a superior breadth of travel experience than any previous geographer. Moreover, his work itself does not privilege autopsy.¹³

Having begun with a claim to a superior degree of personal geographical experience, Strabo proceeds to justify his use of second hand material by an appeal to the science of perception. The idea of personal travel to, and autopsy of, the far-flung spaces of the world prioritises the sense of sight. Strabo acknowledges the value of travel and the visual sense, but he argues for a more holistic approach to sense perception by which the mind collates the input of all of the senses, in particular relying on hearing:

However, they and I receive the greater part [of our geographical knowledge] by hearing and put together shape and size and other natural characteristics of whatever quality and quantity, indeed, the same way in which the mind assembles intelligible things out of perceptible things. The senses report the shape, skin and size of an apple, as well as its smell, feel and flavour, and the mind assembles the concept of an apple from those things. While the senses perceive the parts of large shapes, the mind assembles the whole out of what is perceived. In this way, those men who love knowledge trust just like sensory organs those who have seen and wandered through whatever places they happened upon in this or that part of the earth, and assemble their perception of the whole world into a single figure. Although generals do everything themselves, they are not

12 Dueck (2000) 15–30; Roller (2014) 8–11; Wallace (1979); Waddy (1963). From references in his *Geography*, he visited the Aegean (10.5.3), Egypt and Aithiopia (2.5.12; 17.1.24), and Cappadocia (12.2.3), travelled to Brundisium by sea and from there to Rome by road (6.3.7), Clarke (1997) 99. Dueck rebuts Pais' suggestion that Strabo visited Berytus and Ascalon, Dueck (2000) 22, n. 52. On Strabo's accompaniment of Aelius Gallus' expedition down the Arabian coast of the Red Sea, described by Strabo at 16.4.22–24, see Nicolet (1991) 85, with n. 4.

13 As does, for example, that of Herodotus, Hartog (1988) 262–63.

present everywhere, but successfully manage most things through other people, trusting in messengers and sending around their orders properly in accordance with the reports they have heard. Those who think that only those who have seen possess knowledge remove the criterion of hearing, which is much more important than sight for knowledge.¹⁴

Strabo places great weight on hearing as a sense of geographical perception, by which he refers to the transmission of prior scholarship through the act of scribal reading. He likens the work of the geographer to that of a general who hears second hand reports from others and, trusting them like his own sensory organs (ὥσπερ αἰσθητηρίους πιστεύσαντες), is able to bring about victory (κατορθοῦσι δι' ἐτέρων). In Strabo's model of geographical knowledge production, the geographer gathers sensory perceptions from trusted sources and forms a mental assembly (συντίθημι) of those varied perceptions into a conception (νόησις) of the geographical space in question. In support of this argument, Strabo provides a list of peoples and places concerning which his contemporaries (οἱ νῦν) are able to say (λέγειν) better things.¹⁵ While it stands

14 Strabo 2.5.11: τὸ μέντοι πλέον κάκεινοι καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀκοῇ παραλαβόντες συντίθεμεν καὶ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ τὴν ἄλλην φύσιν ὅποια καὶ ὁπόση, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ὄνπερ ἡ διάνοια ἐκ τῶν αἰσθητῶν συντίθησι τὰ νοητά· σχῆμα γὰρ καὶ χρόαν καὶ μέγεθος μήλου καὶ ὁδὴν καὶ ἀφῆν καὶ χυμὸν ἀπαγγέλλουσιν αἱ αἰσθήσεις, ἐκ δὲ τούτων συντίθησιν ἡ διάνοια τὴν τοῦ μήλου νόησιν· καὶ αὐτῶν δὲ τῶν μεγάλων σχημάτων τὰ μέρη μὲν αἰσθησις ὁρᾷ, τὸ δ' ἔλκον ἐκ τῶν ὁραθέντων ἡ διάνοια συντίθησιν. οὕτω δὲ καὶ οἱ φιλομαθεῖς ἄνδρες ὥσπερ αἰσθητηρίους πιστεύσαντες τοῖς ἰδοῦσι καὶ πλανηθεῖσιν οὓς ἔτυχε τόπους ἄλλοις κατ' ἄλλα μέρη τῆς γῆς, συντιθέασιν εἰς ἓν διάγραμμα τὴν τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης ὅψιν· ἐπεὶ καὶ οἱ στρατηγοὶ πάντα μὲν αὐτοὶ πράττουσιν, οὐ πανταχοῦ δὲ πάρεσιν, ἀλλὰ πλείστα κατορθοῦσι δι' ἐτέρων, ἀγγέλους πιστεύοντες καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἀκοὴν διαπέμποντες οἰκείως τὰ προστάγματα. ὁ δ' ἀξιῶν μόνους εἰδέναι τοὺς ἰδόντας ἀναιρεῖ τὸ τῆς ἀκοῆς κριτήριον, ἥτις πρὸς ἐπιστήμην ὀφθαλμοῦ πολὺ κρείττων ἐστὶ.

15 Strabo 2.5.12: “Μάλιστα δ' οἱ νῦν ἄμεινον ἔχουσιν ἂν τι λέγειν περὶ τῶν κατὰ Βρεττανοὺς καὶ Γερμανοὺς καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἰστρον τοὺς τε ἐντὸς καὶ τοὺς ἐκτὸς Γέτας τε καὶ Τυρεγέτας καὶ Βαστάρνας, ἔτι δὲ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Καύκασον, οἷον Ἀλβανοὺς καὶ Ἰβήρας. Ἀπήγγελλται δ' ἡμῖν καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν τὰ Παρθικά συγγραφάντων, τῶν περὶ Ἀπολλόδωρον τὸν Ἀρτεμιτινόν, ἃ πολλῶν ἐκείνοι μάλλον ἀφώρισαν, τὰ περὶ τὴν Ὑρκανίαν καὶ τὴν Βακτριανήν· τῶν τε Ῥωμαίων καὶ εἰς τὴν εὐδαίμονα Ἀραβίαν ἐμβαλόντων μετὰ στρατιᾶς νεωστὶ, ἧς ἡγεῖτο ἀνὴρ φίλος ἡμῖν καὶ ἐταῖρος Αἰλῖος Γάλλος, καὶ τῶν ἐκ τῆς Ἀλεξανδρείας ἐμπόρων στόλοις ἤδη πλεόντων διὰ τοῦ Νεῖλου καὶ τοῦ Ἀραβίου κόλπου μέχρι τῆς Ἰνδικῆς, πολὺ μάλλον καὶ ταῦτα ἐγνωσται τοῖς νῦν ἢ τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν. ὅτε γοῦν Γάλλος ἐπῆρχε τῆς Αἰγύπτου, συνόντες αὐτῷ καὶ συναναβάντες μέχρι Συήνης καὶ τῶν Αἰθιοπικῶν ὧρον ἱστοροῦμεν, ὅτι καὶ ἑκατὸν καὶ εἴκοσι νῆες πλείοιεν ἐκ Μυδῶς ὁρμου πρὸς τὴν Ἰνδικήν, πρότερον ἐπὶ τῶν Πτολεμαϊκῶν βασιλέων ὀλίγων παντάπασι θαρρούντων πλεῖν καὶ τὸν Ἰνδικὸν ἐμπορεύεσθαι φόρτον.” (Certainly those who write today are better informed about the Britons, the Germans, those around the Danube – both on this side and the other – the Getans, the Tyregetans, the Bastarnians, as well as those around the Caucasus, such as the Albanians and the Iberians. Information has been reported to us by the writers of

to reason that someone able to give a good account of a distant people or place would be good source of heard information (ἀκοῇ), Strabo does not elaborate on why that would be better than observing the objects of study himself (ιδόντας). Regardless, Strabo thus justifies the expansion of his geographical project beyond the bounds of his personal experience of travel and autopsy.

We now turn to the expert opinions which Strabo trusted to assemble his concept (νόησις) of οἱ Ἀσσύριοι, the space which included the Mesopotamian Borderland. Strabo mentions many of his sources by name throughout his work. In book 16, he mentions Eratosthenes, Posidonius, Artemidorus, Nearchus and Orthagoras, Aristobulus, and Polyclitus.¹⁶ The first three of these sources were major geographic writers of the Hellenistic period, while the latter four all had first-hand knowledge of Alexander's campaigns.¹⁷

Many of Strabo's sources for the areas of the former Achaemenid Persian Empire not adjacent to the Mediterranean wrote based on their first-hand knowledge of the spaces in question. Aristobulus of Cassandria was a Macedonian who accompanied Alexander on his campaigns and later wrote a history of those campaigns.¹⁸ His geographic and ethnographic interests

Parthian matters, such as those following Apollodorus of Artemita, who defined these areas better than others, and about Hyrcania and Bactriana. The Romans recently invaded Arabia Felix with an army, led by my friend and companion Aelius Gallus, and merchants from Alexandria are sailing on expeditions by means of the Nile and Arabian Gulf as far as India, so that these areas are much better known today than to our predecessors. At any rate, when Gallus commanded Egypt, I accompanied him and went up the Nile as far as Syene and the boundaries of the Aithiopians, and we recorded that 120 ships sailed from Myos Hormos to India, but formerly, under the Ptolemaic kings, only a few dared to sail and to trade merchandise with the Indians.) Translation adapted from Roller (2014). For Apollodorus of Artemita: Gärtner, Hans Armin, "Apollodorus [8a]" *BNP*. D'Hautcourt, Alexis, "Apollodoros of Artemita (779)", *BNJ*. On the temporal significance of νῦν in Strabo's work, see Potheary (1997).

- 16 Eratosthenes: Strabo 16.1.12; Posidonius: 16.1.15; Artemidorus: 16.2.33; Nearchus and Orthagoras 16.3.5; Aristobulus 16.1.11; and Polyclitus 16.1.13. For a list of Strabo's sources organised by geographical region, see Appendix C in Clarke (1999) 374–78, esp. p. 377 for 'Babylonia, Assyria, Media, Persia, Parthia'. Clarke's category spans books 15 and 16.
- 17 Strabo's first work may have been a *Deeds of Alexander* (2.1.9). This historical work informed the relevant sections of books 11, 15 and 16 in particular and relied on several first person accounts of the campaign: Pédech (1974); Roller (2014) 7, n. 30.
- 18 Most of the evidence for Aristobulus' work comes from fragments preserved by Strabo and Arrian's *Anabasis*. Pownall, 'Aristoboulos of Kassandreia (139)' *BNJ*. Arr. *Anab.* 1.1.1–2 (= *BNJ* 139 T6): "Πτολεμαῖος ὁ Λάγου καὶ Ἀριστόβουλος ὁ Ἀριστοβούλου ὅσα μὲν ταῦτα ἄμφω περὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου ... συνέγραψαν, ταῦτα ἐγὼ ὡς πάντῃ ἀληθῆ ἀναγράφω... ὁ μὲν ὅτι συνεστράτευσε βασιλεῖ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ Ἀριστόβουλος... ἄμφω δὲ ὅτι τετελευτηκότος ἤδη Ἀλεξάνδρου ξυγγράφουσιν..." (In the places where Ptolemy the son of Lagos and Aristoboulos the son of Aristoboulos reach a consensus about Alexander, I record what

made him an important source for Strabo on Babylonia and India. Strabo cites Aristobulus for a long passage on Alexander's inspection and repair of the canals of Babylonia and the construction of a fleet for his proposed invasion of Arabia.¹⁹ Polyclitus of Larisa also participated in Alexander's campaigns and wrote a work whose exact nature is unclear from the preserved fragments.²⁰ Strabo cites Polyclitus to critique the latter's opinion that the Euphrates never overflows its banks.²¹ Nearchus and Orthagoras also participated in Alexander's campaigns. Nearchus is most notable for his command of the fleet which Alexander dispatched from the mouth of the Indus to survey the coast as far as the mouth of the Euphrates.²² He later wrote a *periplus* of this journey which Arrian used extensively for his *Indica*. Strabo cited this work several

they say as entirely true ... in the case of Aristoboulos because he went on campaign with King Alexander ... and because both men wrote their histories after the death of Alexander.) Pownall trans. Heckel (2006) 46; Brunt (1974); Badian, 'Aristobulus [7]', *BNP*. Aristobulus was still writing after 301 BCE; he reports the death of Antigonos as Ipsus in that year, Arr. *Anab.* 7.18.5.

- 19 Strabo 16.1.11: "φησὶ δ' Ἀριστόβουλος τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον αὐτὸν ἀναπλέοντα καὶ κυβερνῶντα τὸ σκάφος ἐπισκοπεῖν καὶ ἀνακαθαίρειν τὰς διώρυγας μετὰ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν συνακολουθησάντων... σκήψασθαι μὲν οὖν αἰτίαν τοῦ πολέμου φησὶν, ἐπειδὴ μόνοι τῶν ἀπάντων οὐ πρεσβεύσαιντο οἱ Ἀραβες ὡς αὐτόν, τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς ὀρεγόμενον πάντων εἶναι κύριον..." (Aristobulus says that Alexander himself, when he was sailing up and piloting the boat, inspected the canals and with his multitude of followers cleared them out ... [Aristobulus] says that [Alexander] alleged that the cause of the war was that the Arabians were the only ones of all who did not send ambassadors to him, but the truth was that he was grasping at being master of everyone.) Translation adapted from Roller (2014).
- 20 Badian, 'Polyclitus [4]' *BNP*; Sekunda, 'Polykleitos of Larisa (128)', *BNJ*, Heckel (2006) 225. Polyclitus described the luxury of Alexander and Persian kings, Susa (F2), wonders of India (F9, F10), and waterways of Asia (F5 = Str. 16.1.13; F6 = Str. 15.3.4; F7 = Str. 11.7.4; F11a and b). His work ran to eight books and may have been a history, a collection of anecdotes or a memoir.
- 21 Strabo 16.1.13 (= *BNJ* 128 F5): "Πολύκλειτος δέ φησι μὴ πλημμυρεῖν τὸν Εὐφράτην: διὰ γὰρ πεδίον φέρεσθαι μεγάλων, τὰ δ' ὄρη τὰ μὲν δισχιλίους ἀφεστάναι σταδίους τὰ δὲ Κοσσαῖα μόλις χιλίους, οὐ πάνυ ὑψηλὰ οὐδὲ νιφόμενα σφοδρῶς οὐδ' ἀθρόαν ἐπιφέροντα τῇ χιόνι τὴν τῆξιν: εἶναι γὰρ καὶ τὰ ὕψη τῶν ὀρέων ἐν τοῖς ὑπὲρ Ἐκβατάνων μέρεσι τοῖς προσβορείοις: ἐν δὲ τοῖς πρὸς νότον σχιζόμενα καὶ πλατυνόμενα πολὺ ταπεινοῦσθαι, ἅμα δὲ καὶ τὸ πολὺ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐκδέχεσθαι τὸν Τίγριν καὶ οὕτως πλημμυρεῖν. τὸ μὲν οὖν ὕστατον ῥηθὲν φανερώς ἄτοπον ..." (Polyclitus says that the Euphrates does not flood, for it is carried through large plains, and the mountains are 2000 stadia away from it (although the Cossaeans scarcely a thousand), but that they are neither very high nor intensively snowy and do not produce sudden melting of the snow, since the heights of the mountains are in the portions above Ecbatana, toward the north, but toward the south they split, broaden, and become much lower, and at the same time much of their water is received by the Tigris. This latter statement is clearly wrong ...) Translation adapted from Roller (2014).
- 22 Badian, 'Nearchus [2]', *BNP*; Whitby, 'Nearchos (133)', *BNJ*; Heckel (2006) 171–73. *BNJ* 133 T8a = Arr. *Ind.* 20.1; *BNJ* 133 T8b = Strabo 15.2.4; *BNJ* 133 T8c = Diod. Sic. 17.104.3. Curt. 9.10.3;

times in book 15, which included that coastline within its purview, and twice in book 16 for islands in the Persian Gulf.²³ Orthagoras may have participated in Nearchus' coastal expedition. He later wrote an *Indoi logoi* (*Account of India* or perhaps *Stories of India*) of which five fragments have survived.²⁴ The relative dates of these works are unknown. Strabo cites Orthagoras once in book 16.²⁵

The other three writers which Strabo cites by name in book 16 were important Hellenistic scholars with excellent access to such first-hand accounts, but who had probably not travelled extensively in the regions they described.

Eratosthenes of Cyrene was already an established scholar when he was invited to be the head of the library at Alexandria by Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–222 BCE).²⁶ This position gave him unparalleled access to the scientific and geographical literature of the Hellenistic world, including the *ephemerides* (field diaries) of Alexander's campaign.²⁷ His works included a three volume *Geography* (the first two books of which concerned the history of the subject

Plut. *Alex.* 66; Arrian, *Anab.* 6.19.5; 21.3; *Itin. Alex.* 51. Badian (1975) provides a critical account of Nearchus' work.

- 23 Strabo 16.3.5 (= *BNJ* 133 F27): εἰρήχασι καὶ Νέαρχος καὶ Ὀρθαγόρας νῆσον... κείσθαι... ('Nearchus and Orthagoras have said that an island ... lies ...'). The island in question is either Tyrian (τυρίνην) or named Ogyros (Ὠγυρίν); the former is the manuscript reading, the latter is a common emendation; see Whitby's commentary on *BNJ* 133 F27. Strabo 16.3.7 (= *BNJ* 133 F28): "φησὶ δ' ὁ Νέαρχος τὸν Μιθροπάστην ἐντυχεῖν..." (Nearchus says that Mithropastes met ...).
- 24 Karttunen, 'Orthagoras [2]', *BNP*; Engels, 'Orthagoras (713)', *BNJ*; Karttunen (1997) 45–46; Heckel (2006) 186. The name of Orthagoras' work is found in Aelianos, *Peri zoon idiotetos* 16.35 (= *BNJ* 713 F 3). Orthagoras is usually cited together with Nearchus (*BNJ* 713 F 1 = *BNJ* 133 F 12; *BNJ* 713 F 5 = *BNJ* 133 F 27) or with Onesicritus (*BNJ* 713 F 4 = *BNJ* 134 F 31). Nearchus and Onesicritus are reported together at *BNJ* 133 F 30–31. Onesicritus was Alexander's helmsman and interpreter and wrote a biography of Alexander; Goulet-Cazé, 'Onesicritus' *BNP*; Heckel (2006) 183–84. Because these three authors are frequently cited together for descriptions of this region, the boundaries between their works is unclear, see commentary on *BNJ* 133 F 27 (Whitby 'Nearchus').
- 25 Strabo 16.3.7. Because Strabo only cites Orthagoras once, and in conjunction with Nearchus, Whitby suggests that Strabo may not have read Orthagoras' account himself but may have found his opinions in the works of the writers with whom he is cited. He finds support for this suggestion in the use of the singular φημί in 16.3.7 where Strabo is nominally citing both Nearchus and Orthagoras. He takes Νέαρχος alone as its singular subject because other fragments show that Nearchus wrote about the subjects discussed in this passage (See commentary on *BNJ* 133 F 27). The chronological priority of the two authors' respective works is not known.
- 26 *Suda*, s.v. Ἐρατοσθένης = *BNJ* 241 T 1; Strabo 17.3.22 = *BNJ* 241 T 2. See commentary on both passages, and Biographical Essay in Pownall, 'Eratosthenes (241)' *BNJ*. Fraser (1970) 181ff.; Blomqvist (1992) 54–55; Nicolet (1991) 61–62; Biffi (1999) 429. The most recent edition and commentary on the fragments of Eratosthenes is Roller (2010).
- 27 Blomqvist (1992) 55–56, 58.

and several topical investigations, while the third discussed a map of the world) and a volume *Περὶ ἀναμετρήσεως τῆς γῆς* (*On the Measurement of the Earth*).²⁸ Strabo cites and criticises these works extensively, but they were not among those listed in the biography contained in the *Suda*.²⁹ Strabo's criticism of Eratosthenes did not diminish his respect for his predecessor. Rather, it indicated Strabo's own desire to define his work in comparison to the great Alexandrian scholar and situate himself in Eratosthenes' intellectual company.³⁰

Posidonius (135–51 BCE) was a prolific scholar of the first century CE.³¹ He was originally from Apamea, but he became a citizen of Rhodes later in life.³² He travelled widely and communicated with the elite of Roman society, including the likes of Cicero, Pompey and the Marcelli.³³ Posidonius wrote on many philosophical and scientific subjects and, like Strabo, was both a Stoic

28 Zaminer and Tosi, 'Eratosthenes [2]' *BNP*; Fraser (1970) 187–94.

29 *BNJ* 241 T 1. In fact, were it not for Strabo, we would know very little about Eratosthenes' geographic works. For more on Strabo's use of Eratosthenes, see Roller (2010) 15–16.

30 Strabo 17.3.22 (= *BNJ* 241 T 2): Κυρηναῖος δ' ἐστὶ καὶ Καλλιμάχος καὶ Ἐρατοσθένης, ἀμφοτέροι τετιμημένοι παρὰ τοῖς Αἰγυπτίω βασιλεῦσιν, ὁ μὲν ποιητὴς ἅμα καὶ περὶ γραμματικῆν ἐσπουδακώς, ὁ δὲ καὶ ταῦτα καὶ περὶ φιλοσοφίαν καὶ τὰ μαθήματα, εἴ τις ἄλλος, διαφέρων." (Kallimachos and Eratosthenes are from Cyrene, both honored by the kings of the Egyptians. The former was a poet as well as a scholar of literary criticism, and the latter excelled in these fields and also in philosophy and mathematics, if anyone ever did.) Translation by Pownall, 'Eratosthenes of Cyrene (241)' *BNJ*. Strabo 1.2.1: "εἰ δ' ἀναγκασθῇσόμεθα πού τοις αὐτοῖς ἀντιλέγειν, οἷς μάλιστα ἐπακολουθοῦμεν κατ' ἄλλα, δεῖ συγγνώμην ἔχειν: οὐ γάρ πρόκειται πρὸς ἅπαντας ἀντιλέγειν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς μὲν πολλοὺς ἔαν, οἷς μηδὲ ἀκολουθεῖν ἄξιον, ἐκείνους δὲ διαιτᾶν, οὓς ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις κατωρθωκότας ἴσμεν, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ πρὸς ἅπαντας φιλοσοφεῖν ἄξιον, πρὸς Ἐρατοσθένη δὲ καὶ Ἰππαρχον καὶ Ποσειδώνιον καὶ Πολύβιον καὶ ἄλλους τοιοῦτους καλόν." (But if we are ever forced to contradict those whom we otherwise follow, especially closely, there must be pardon. It is not proposed to contradict everyone, but to omit most of them (those whom it is not worth following) and to pass judgement on those whom we know to have been correct in most things. It is thus unworthy to investigate everyone, but it is good to do so with Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, Posidonius, Polybius, and such others.) Translation adapted from Roller (2014). On this passage and Strabo's attitude towards his predecessors generally, see Dueck (2000) 56–58; Nicolet (1991) 57.

31 Inwood, 'Poseidonius [3]', *BNP*; Dowden, 'Poseidonios (87)' *BNJ*; Dueck (2000) 60–61; Nicolet (1991) 65. The most recent major edition of the fragments with extensive commentary is Kidd and Edelstein (1989) (= Ed.-Kidd).

32 Strabo 14.2.13 (= *BNJ* 87 T 2); Strabo 16.2.10 (= *BNJ* 87 T 3); Ps-Lucian *Macrobii* 20 (= *BNJ* 87 T 4); Strabo 7.5.8 (= *BNJ* 87 T 6); Athenaios, *Deipnosophists* 6.61 (= *BNJ* 87 F 4).

33 Travel: Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 5.107 = *BNJ* 87 T 3a. Strabo mentions his travels at various points (3.1.5; 3.2.5; 17.3.4). Circles: Plut. *Mar.* 45 = *BNJ* 87 T 7; Strabo 11.1.6 = *BNJ* 87 T 8a; Plut. *Pomp.* 42 = T 8b; Pliny *NH* 7.112 = *BNJ* 87 T 8c; Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 2.61 = *BNJ* 87 T 8d; See commentary of *BNJ* 87 T 8a for discussion; Momigliano (1975) 32.

and a continuator of Polybius.³⁴ Strabo shared these intellectual interests with Posidonius and it is no surprise that he included him in his list of predecessors worthy of attention and criticism.³⁵

The final source mentioned by Strabo in book 16 is Artemidorus of Ephesus, a geographer of the late second and early first century BCE who wrote a historical work on Ionia and an eleven book *Geography* (Γεωγραφούμενα) which survives only in fragments, many from Strabo.³⁶ Artemidorus' geographic work seems to have taken the form of a *periplus*; an epitome by Marcianus of Heracleia survives.³⁷ The only such fragment in book 16 concerns a set of distances between places on the Phoenician coast.³⁸

Strabo drew on a range of excellent sources, both witnesses and renowned scholars with the best access to sources which are no longer extant. We know this because he tells us. The first two books of his *Geography* are a detailed discussion of his geographical, philosophical and philological methodologies. Throughout his work, he refers to these same authors with some variation in citation style. How he used these authors bears examination.

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- 34 Dowden, 'Poseidonios (87)' *BNJ* 87 T1. On the question of Strabo's Stoicism, see Dueck (2000) 62–69; Laurent (2008); Roseman (2005). Strabo (2.2.1) characterised Poseidonius' geographic writing (in *περὶ ὠκεανοῦ*) as partly "appropriate" (τὰ μὲν οἰκείως) and partly mathematical (τὰ δὲ μαθηματικώτερον); the former has significant implications for pragmatic Stoicism. Strabo's defense of second-hand knowledge also allows him to justify the wide scope of his work, akin to the universal or universalising approaches of Polybius and Posidonius, Engels (1999) esp. 145–201.
- 35 Strabo 1.2.1. At 3.2.9, Strabo specifically criticises Posidonius' rhetorical presentation and emotional engagement with his subject material. Inwood ('Poseidonius [3]', *BNP*) suggests that Posidonius' moralising presentation of mining (Strabo 3.2.9 = *BNJ* 87 F 47) was "probably typical of his integrated approach" of presenting natural history combined with philosophical ideas.
- 36 Brodersen, 'Artemidoros [3]', *BNP*; Banchich, 'Artemidoros of Ephesos (438)', *BNJ*; Dueck (2000) 59–60.
- 37 Gärtner, 'Marcianus [1]', *BNP*.
- 38 Strabo 16.2.33: "τοιαύτη μὲν ἡ Φοινίκη. φησὶ δ' Ἀρτεμίδωρος εἰς τὸ Πηλοῦσιον ἐκ μὲν Ὀρθωσίας εἶναι σταδίους τρισχιλίους ἑξακοσίους πενήκοντα κατακολπίζοντι: ἐκ δὲ Μελαινῶν ἢ Μελαινῶν τῆς Κιλικίας τῶν πρὸς Κελένδεριν ἐπὶ μὲν τὰ μεθόρια τῆς Κιλικίας καὶ Συρίας χιλίους καὶ ἑνακοσίους: ἐντεῦθεν δ' ἐπὶ τὸν Ὀρόντην πεντακοσίους εἰκοσιν: εἴτ' ἐπὶ Ὀρθωσίαν χιλίους ἑκατὸν τριάκοντα." (Such is Phoenicia. Artemidorus says that it is 3650 stadia to Pelusium from Orthosia, going through the gulfs, and from Melainai, or Melaniai, in Cilicia near Celenderis, to the common boundary of Cilicia and Syria, it is 1900 stadia. From there to the Orontes is 520, and then it is 1130 to Orthosia.) Translation adapted from Roller (2014). Safrai (2005) argues that Strabo's description of Phoenicia reflects a geographical source writing in the early second century BCE; Artemidorus wrote a little later than Safrai's suggested unknown source, but otherwise fits Safrai's suggestion well, especially given the temporal layering in geographical texts which Safrai himself shows.

Strabo's first citation of Eratosthenes in book 16, a short passage on the hydrology of the Euphrates, is one of the most complete examples of Strabo's citation style:

Eratosthenes, when he mentions the lakes near Arabia, says that when the water is unable to exit, it opens up underground passages and flows underground as far as Coelê-Syria, pressing into the region of Rhinocorura and Mount Casius, creating lakes and the pits there. I don't know if what he says is likely. The overflow of the Euphrates that creates the lakes near Arabia and the marshes is near the Persian Sea, but the isthmus that separates them is neither large nor rocky. Thus it is more probable that the water would force its way into the sea – either underground or on the surface – than it would complete more than 6000 stadia through such a waterless and dry region with mountains – such as the Libanus, the Antilibanus, and the Casius – situated in the middle of it. These people [Eratosthenes and Aristobulus] say such things.³⁹

Strabo indicates the author and context of the citation (Ἐρατοσθένης... μνησθεις... “Eratosthenes, when he mentions ...”) then proceeds to the citation in reported speech governed by φησὶ. He then signals his own opinion (οὐκ οἶδα δ' εἰ πιθανῶς εἴρηκεν, “I don't know if what he says is likely”), provides his counter-arguments, and explicitly closes the discussion (οἱ μὲν δὴ τοιαῦτα λέγουσι, “These people say such things”). Here Strabo displays three common features of his citation style: use of reported speech with φησὶ,⁴⁰ occasional

39 Strabo 16.1.12: Ἐρατοσθένης δὲ τῶν λιμνῶν μνησθεις τῶν πρὸς τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ, φησὶ τὸ ὕδωρ ἀπορούμενον διεξόδων ἀνοίξει πόρους ὑπὸ γῆς καὶ δι' ἐκείνων ὑποφέρεσθαι μέχρι Κοιλοσύρων: ἀναθλίβεσθαι δὲ εἰς τοὺς περὶ Ῥινοκόρουρα καὶ τὸ Κάσιον ὄρος τόπους καὶ ποιεῖν τὰς ἐκεῖ λίμνας καὶ τὰ βάραθρα: οὐκ οἶδα δ' εἰ πιθανῶς εἴρηκεν. αἱ γὰρ τοῦ Εὐφράτου παρεκχύσεις αἱ ποιοῦσαι τὰς πρὸς τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ λίμνας καὶ τὰ ἔλη πλησίον εἰσὶ τῆς κατὰ Πέρσας θαλάττης, ὁ δὲ διείργων ἰσθμὸς οὔτε πολὺς ἐστὶν οὔτε πετρώδης, ὥστε αὐτῇ μᾶλλον εἰκὸς ἦν βιάσασθαι τὸ ὕδωρ εἰς τὴν θάλατταν, εἴτ' ὑπὸ γῆς εἴτ' ἐπιπολῆς, ἢ πλείους τῶν ἐξακισχιλίων σταδίων διανύειν, ἄνδρον καὶ ξηρὰν οὕτω, καὶ ταῦτα ὁρῶν ἐν μέσῳ κειμένων, τοῦ τε Λιβάνου καὶ τοῦ Ἀντιλιβάνου καὶ τοῦ Κασίου: οἱ μὲν δὴ τοιαῦτα λέγουσι. Translation adapted from Roller (2014).

40 Citations with φησι and indirect speech: Strabo 16.1.13 (Polyclitus); 16.1.15 and 16.2.4 (Posidonius); 16.2.33 (Artemidorus); Strabo 16.3.7 (Nearchus). At 16.1.11, Strabo cites Aristobulus at the beginning of the passage (“φησὶ δ' Ἀριστόβουλος τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον... ἐπισκοπεῖν” (Aristobulus says that Alexander inspected ...)) then because of the length of this passage, he later reminds the reader that he is reporting Aristobulus' work with another φησὶν (“he says”). At 16.3.5, Strabo cites Nearchus and Orthagoras jointly with εἰρέω then reiterates the citation with φησιν: εἰρήκασι καὶ Νέαρχος καὶ Ὀρθαγόρας νῆσον... κεῖσθαι... (“Nearchus and Orthagoras have said that an island ... lies ...”). Strabo also uses εἰρέω to quote Eratosthenes directly at 16.1.15.

interjection of his own opinion with first person verbs,⁴¹ and passing reference to anonymous authors.⁴²

As can be seen, Strabo cites and responds to his sources on a regular basis. Sometimes he cites authors for the information their work contains (such as his lengthy paraphrase of Aristobulus and his use of Nearchus, Orthagorus and Artemidorus) and at other times cites them to contradict their assertions (such as his report of Polyclitus' opinion on the Euphrates). The vast majority of sources he names are Hellenistic writers, usually either noted geographers in their own right or people who had travelled through the areas under discussion and written works drawing on that first-hand experience of the spaces. In the most complex source engagement in his description of Mesopotamia, he cites the opinions of several authors on naphtha: Eratosthenes is cited directly, a collective group of unnamed authors are paraphrased, and then Poseidonius is invoked and paraphrased to conclude the section.⁴³ Nevertheless, since Strabo frequently described places which he had not visited, he must have used his sources far more than he cited them; his normal practice is not to cite.

41 At 16.1.13 (= *BNJ* 128 F5) Strabo concludes his citation with his own opinion on the truth of the part of Polyclitus' statements: τὸ μὲν οὖν ὕστατον ῥηθὲν φανερώς ἄτοπον... ("This latter comment is clearly wrong ...").

42 Strabo 16.1.15.

43 First, Eratosthenes is cited using εἶρηκεν and direct speech with ὅτι: Strabo 16.1.15: "περὶ ἧς Ἐρατοσθένης μὲν οὕτως εἶρηκεν ὅτι ἡ μὲν ὑγρὰ ἦν καλοῦσι νάφθα, γίνεται ἐν τῇ Σουσίδι, ἡ δὲ ξηρὰ δυνάμενη πῆττεσθαι ἐν τῇ Βαβυλωνίᾳ: ταύτης δ' ἐστὶν ἡ πηγή τοῦ Εὐφράτου πλησίον: πλημύροντος δὲ τούτου κατὰ τὰς τῶν χιόνων τήξεις καὶ αὐτὴ πληροῦται καὶ ὑπέρχουσιν εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν λαμβάνει: ἐνταῦθα δὲ συνίστανται βῶλοι μεγάλοι πρὸς τὰς οἰκοδομὰς ἐπιτήδεια: τὰς διὰ τῆς ὀπτῆς πλίνθου." (... about which Eratosthenes says that the liquid kind, which is called naphtha, is found in Susis, but the dry kind, which can be solidified, is in Babylonia. There is a fountain of this latter near the Euphrates, and at the time of flooding by snow-melt it fills and overflows into the river. Large lumps are formed that are suitable for structures of baked brick.) Second, the opinions of unnamed "others" are expressed using indirect speech. The passage continues: "ἄλλοι δὲ καὶ τὴν ὑγρὰν ἐν τῇ Βαβυλωνίᾳ γίνεσθαι φασί. περὶ μὲν οὖν τῆς ξηρᾶς εἶρηται πόσον τὸ χρησίμων τὸ ἐκ τῶν οἰκοδομιῶν μάλιστα: φασὶ δὲ καὶ πλοῖα πλέεσθαι, ἐμπλασθέντα δ' ἀσφάλτῳ πυκνοῦσθαι... πείρας δὲ χάριν φασὶν Ἀλέξανδρον ἐν λουτρῷ προσχεῖν παιδί τοῦ νάφθα καὶ προσαγαγεῖν λύχνον..." (Others say that the liquid kind also occurs in Babylonia. They say that the dry kind is particularly useful in building construction, and they say that boats are woven, but when smeared with asphalt they become solid ... They say that Alexander, making an experiment, poured naphtha on a boy in a bath and brought a lamp to him ...) Finally, Posidonius concludes the passage in indirect speech: "Ποσειδώνιος δὲ φησι τοῦ ἐν τῇ Βαβυλωνίᾳ νάφθα τὰς πηγὰς τὰς μὲν εἶναι λευκοῦ τὰς δὲ μέλανος...", τὰς δὲ τοῦ μέλανος ἀσφάλτου ὑγρᾶς, ᾧ ἂντ' ἐλαίου τοὺς λύχνους κάουσι." (Poseidonius says that some of the naphtha springs in Babylonia are white while others are black ...) Translations adapted from Roller (2014). The extensive set of citations is an indication of the importance of naphtha to Strabo's conception of Babylonia.

Only one of the citations in book 16 is directly quoted; the rest are reworded at least enough to be presented in indirect speech, if not completely paraphrased. Strabo's reworking of material can be seen by comparing a story that he recounts in book 16 to the same story in Athenaios, who cites Posidonius as the source. First Athenaios' version:

And I know that Poseidonios the Stoic, too, said the following about a huge number of fish: 'Tryphon of Apameia, the man who seized the throne of Syria, was attacked by Sarpedon, the general of Demetrios, near the city of Ptolemais, and Sarpedon, defeated, withdrew inland with his own troops, whilst those of Tryphon, victorious in the battle, took the coastal road. Suddenly a wave from the sea, raised up to an extraordinary height, invaded the land and engulfed them all. It drowned them and the wave withdrew, it left behind a huge heap of fish together with the bodies. Sarpedon's men heard about the disaster and when they arrived on the scene they were delighted at the bodies of their enemies, carried off an abundance of fish, and sacrificed to Poseidon Tropaios at the suburbs of the city'...⁴⁴

Athenaios claims to be quoting Posidonius directly with ὅτε and direct speech. Strabo reports the same story indirectly and without citation:

An amazing event is told, which has very few parallels, and took place on this sea shore between Tyre and Ptolemais. On an occasion when the Ptolemaians had joined battle with the general Sarpedon and remained in this place following a brilliant rout (of Sarpedon), a wave from the sea like a flood-tide overwhelmed them as they fled (from it). Some were carried off into the sea and killed; others remained in depressions, dead. As the sea receded again, it uncovered and revealed the bodies of the fallen with fish mixed in with the corpses.⁴⁵

44 *BNJ* 87 F 29 = Ed.-Kidd F 226 = Athenaios, *Deipnosophists* 8.7: οἶδα δὲ καὶ Ποσειδώνιον τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς εἰπόντα [καὶ] περὶ πλήθους ἰχθύων τάδε· “ὅτε Τρύφων ὁ Ἀπαμειεύς ὁ τῆν τῶν Σύρων βασιλείαν ἀρπάσας ἐπολεμείτο ὑπὸ Σαρπηδόνης τοῦ Δημητρίου στρατηγοῦ περὶ Πτολεμαίδα πόλιν καὶ ὡς ὁ Σαρπηδὼν λειφθεὶς ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὴν μεσόγειαν μετὰ τῶν ἰδίων στρατιωτῶν, οἱ δὲ τοῦ Τρύφωνος ὤδευον κατὰ τὸ πλησίον νικήσαντες τῇ μάχῃ, ἐξαίφνης πελάγιον κύμα ἐξαρθὲν μετέωρον εἰς ὕψος ἐξάισιον ἐπῆλθεν τῇ γῇ καὶ πάντας αὐτοὺς ἐπέκλυσεν διέφθειρὲν τε ὑποβρυχίους, ἰχθύων τε πολὺν σωρὸν ἀναχωροῦν τὸ κύμα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν κατέλιπε. καὶ οἱ περὶ τὸν Σαρπηδὼνα ἀκούσαντες τὴν συμφορὰν ἐπελθόντες τοῖς μὲν τῶν πολεμίων σώμασιν ἐφήσθησαν, ἰχθύων δὲ ἀφθονίαν ἀπηνέγκαντο καὶ ἔθυσαν Ποσειδῶνι τροπαίῳ πρὸς τοῖς προαστείοις τῆς πόλεως.”... Translation Dowden (*BNJ*).

45 Strabo 16.2.26: Ἱστορεῖται δὲ παράδοξον πάθος τῶν πάντων σπανίων κατὰ τὸν αἰγιαλὸν τοῦτον τὸν μεταξὺ τῆς τε Τύρου καὶ τῆς Πτολεμαίδος. καθ’ ὃν γὰρ καιρὸν οἱ Πτολεμαεῖς μάχην συνάψαντες

TABLE 2.1

Feature	Athenaios/Poseidonius	Strabo
1	περὶ Πτολεμαίδα πόλιν	τὸν μεταξὺ τῆς τε Τύρου καὶ τῆς Πτολεμαΐδος
2	Τρύφων ὁ Ἀπαμεὺς ὁ τὴν τῶν Σύρων βασιλείαν ἀρπάσας ἐπολεμεῖτο ὑπὸ Σαρπηδόνοιο τοῦ Δημητρίου	οἱ Πτολεμαεῖς μάχην συνάψαντες πρὸς Σαρπηδόνα τὸν στρατηγὸν
3	ἐξαίφνης πελάγιον κύμα ἐξαρθέν μετέωρον εἰς ὕψος ἐξάσιον ἐπήλθεν τῇ γῇ καὶ πάντας αὐτοὺς ἐπέκλυσεν διέφθειρέν τε ὑποβρυχίους	ἐπέκλυσεν ἐκ τοῦ πελάγους κύμα τοὺς φεύγοντας ὅμοιον πλημμυρίδι
4	διέφθειρέν τε ὑποβρυχίους, ἰχθύων τε πολλὴν σωρὸν ἀναχωροῦν τὸ κύμα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν κατέλιπε	διαδεξαμένη δὲ ἡ ἄμπωτις πάλιν ἀνεκάλυψε καὶ ἔδειξε τὰ σώματα τῶν κειμένων ἀναμιξὶ ἐν νεκροῖς ἰχθύσι

These stories both reflect the same incident from the mid-second century BCE.⁴⁶ Strabo's version of the event refers to a source obliquely ('Ἱστορεῖται δὲ παράδοξον, "a story is told of an amazing event"). Although Strabo does not quote a source for the passage, the similarity with the directly quoted fragment found in Athenaios suggests that a common source is likely in Poseidonius. The stories include many of the same narrative features: a geographical reference to the location of the event (1),⁴⁷ the main protagonists (2), a huge wave of the sea presented in similar language (3), and a pile of bodies mixed with fishes (4). Table 2.1 compares the Greek text of these four narrative features in Athenaios (directly quoting Poseidonius) and Strabo (paraphrasing an unnamed author).

The latter two elements preserve respectively the vocabulary and an evocative metaphor of Poseidonius. While Poseidonius (as preserved in Athenaios) painted a vivid picture of the event, including the powerful image of bodies mixed with fishes, his report is somewhat matter-of-fact when compared to the

πρὸς Σαρπηδόνα τὸν στρατηγὸν ἐλείφθησαν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ τροπῆς γενομένης λαμπρᾶς, ἐπέκλυσεν ἐκ τοῦ πελάγους κύμα τοὺς φεύγοντας ὅμοιον πλημμυρίδι, καὶ τοὺς μὲν εἰς τὸ πέλαγος ἀπῆρπασε καὶ διέφθειρεν, οἱ δ' ἐν τοῖς κοίλοις τόποις ἔμειναν νεκροί· διαδεξαμένη δὲ ἡ ἄμπωτις πάλιν ἀνεκάλυψε καὶ ἔδειξε τὰ σώματα τῶν κειμένων ἀναμιξὶ ἐν νεκροῖς ἰχθύσι... Translation Dowden (*BNJ*).

46 Either 139 BCE (Dowden, *BNJ* 87 F 29 Commentary) or 144/3 BCE (Ed.-Kidd F 226 Comment, Kidd and Edelstein (1989) 808).

47 On Ptolemais, see Cohen (2006) 213–21.

more stylised and literary description of Strabo. Moreover, Strabo omits certain precise aspects of the story which he judged superfluous to his geographical description of the Syria coast. Strabo elides the name of the victorious general, Tryphon of Apameia, as well as the more precise notes on the movement of the two armies that Poseidonius provided, including the return of Sarpedon's army, the collection of the fish, and the sacrifice to Poseidon Tropaios.

From this case, we can see that even when Strabo does not report a source, he is selecting and reworking material from one or more of his many sources and creating his own narrative from that material. The inclusion and exclusion of any given geographical feature, description or measurement was his own choice. He is dependent on the information that his sources provide, but he is not bound by their selective choices. The geography he constructs is, therefore, to a large degree his own. Why then does he periodically choose to mention the names of his sources at all? There is no clear pattern to the occasions on which he reports them. He does not exclusively use citations to present a position with which he intends to disagree. While he sometimes disagrees, refutes or casts doubt on the opinions of those he cites, he equally often gives no indication that the cited opinion should be disregarded. Nor is there any indication that he cites sources in order to preserve any particular syntactical features. The answer lies at the start of his *Geography*. At 1.2.1, Strabo notes that it is good (καλόν) to engage with worthy predecessors like Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, Posidonius, Polybius and such others (ἄλλους τοιούτους).⁴⁸ His use of these authors is thus a claim to authority. By naming such notable scholars he validates and authorises his own scholarship and the geography he constructs within it.

There is no evidence that Strabo travelled in the region of Mesopotamia, so he relied on the reports of others in composing his *Geography*. As far as we can tell, Strabo used the best sources available to him. Of the seven sources Strabo names for book 16, four were witnesses to Alexander's campaigns and the other three were geographers who probably had access to first-hand reports. Eratosthenes, Strabo's most important source, certainly had access to the literary resources of Alexandria.⁴⁹ Moreover, Strabo was heir to the rigorous geographical debates among Hellenistic scientific geographers like Eratosthenes, Hipparchus and Poseidonius.⁵⁰ This is not to say that Strabo's work was based only on Hellenistic Greek sources and relied solely on outdated material. Strabo displays his familiarity with contemporary events at several points in his work.

48 Strabo 1.2.1.

49 Blomqvist (1992).

50 Hübner, Hipparchus [6], *BNP*; Viedebant (1915).

His historical research included Roman activities in Syria and Mesopotamia.⁵¹ As a native of Pontus, Mithridates was of particular interest to him and he included events from the Roman campaigns against Mithridates and Tigranes in the 80s, 70s and 60s BCE.⁵² Strabo connected several sites in Syria to the Parthian invasions of the 40s BCE, included several Tiberian political perspectives, and noted the first annexation of Commagene in 18 CE.⁵³ Strabo thus depended on Hellenistic Greek geographical works as the basis of his *Geography*, but selectively created his own narrative by mixing and rearranging that material with more recent knowledge obtained from Roman sources. These factors all contribute to Strabo's creation of a geography of the world centred on Rome.⁵⁴ This focus will be further explored in Chapter 7.

2 Pliny's Sources

As a Roman veteran, a scholar and an administrator from an Italian family with close links to the imperial house, we might expect Pliny to display a different approach to knowledge production and source use from Strabo, which he does to an extent. However, the question of Pliny's geographical sources is much more complicated than Strabo's because of both the way he reports his sources and his overall geographical project.⁵⁵ This section begins with Pliny's overt statements about his sources and his methodology, then shows how the reality of Pliny's production of geographical knowledge differed from his explicit statements.

Like Strabo, Pliny relied on both autopsy and literary reports in his descriptions of the world and its contents. His discussion of the nature and variety of winds in book 2 includes a contrast between the two modes of knowledge acquisition:

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- 51 The rest of Strabo's *Geography* is sprinkled with commentary on recent Roman events, in particular Aelius Gallus' expedition into Arabia (16.4.22–24), the influence of Roman control on Egyptian commerce (17.1.11–12), and Strabo's judgements of the Roman Empire (6.4.2; 17.3.24–25). Safrai (2005) examines the temporal layers visible in Strabo's description of Phoenicia, Judaea and northern Syria.
 - 52 On Strabo's Pontic background: Dueck (2000) 3–5; Braund (2005).
 - 53 Potheary (2002).
 - 54 Dueck (2000) 101–6. Potheary (2005) examines the tension between Greek cultural power and Roman imperial power in Strabo's *Geography*.
 - 55 The question of Pliny's geographical sources is examined in detail by Detlefsen (1909).

More than twenty old Greek writers have published their observations about these [winds]. And this is the more remarkable, seeing that there is so much discord in the world, and that it is divided into different kingdoms, that is into separate members, that there should have been so many who were concerned with such difficult investigations, especially at a time of wars and treachery, and when pirates, the enemies of everyone, terrify with their infamy everyone who moves about, so that today a person may acquire truer knowledge about a country from the writings of those who have never been there, than from the inhabitants themselves. But now in a time of such joyous peace which, under a princeps who so greatly encourages the growth of the arts, no new inquiries have been made at all, nor are the discoveries of the ancients mastered. There were not greater rewards, with the great prosperity being spread among many people, but that there were more people who studied these things seeking no reward except benefiting posterity. For the morals of men have grown weak, not the rewards, and since all the seas, however many there are, lie open and every shore one approaches is hospitable, a great number of people undertake voyages; for the sake of profit, not knowledge. Nor does the blinded mind intent on greed reckon that this very thing might be able to be done more safely by knowledge. In which case, since there are so many people sailing, I will discuss the winds in more careful detail than might seem appropriate to the work I am constructing.⁵⁶

The temporal context of Pliny's text is confused, but he contrasts between a time of wars, treachery, and piracy (*hodie*) and a time of peace and potential scientific discovery (*nunc*). In the former time, widespread discord means that better knowledge is available from the writing of others (*ex eorum commentariis*) than from the knowledge of people native to the space in question

56 Pliny *NH* 2.117–118: Viginti amplius auctores Graeci veteres prodidere de his observationes. Quo magis miror orbe discordi et in regna, hoc est in membra, diviso tot viris curae fuisse tam ardua inventu, inter bella praesertim et infida hospitia, piratis etiam, omnium mortalium hostibus, transituros fama terrentibus, ut hodie quaedam in suo quisque tractu ex eorum commentariis, qui numquam eo accessere, verius noscat quam indigenarum scientia, nunc vero pace tam festa, tam gaudente proventu rerum artiumque principe, omnino nihil addisci nova inquisitione, immo ne veterum quidem inventa perdisci. [118] Non erant maiora praemia, in multis dispersa fortunae magnitudine, et ista plures sine praemio alio quam posteros iuvandi eruerunt. Namque mores hominum senuere, non fructus, et inmensa multitudo aperto, quodcumque est, mari hospitalique litorum omnium adpulsu navigat, sed lucri, non scientiae, gratia. Nec reputat caeca mens et tantum avaritiae intenta id ipsum scientia posse tutius fieri. Quapropter scrupulosius, quam instituto fortassis conveniat operi, tractabo ventos, tot milia navigantium cemens.

(*indigenarum scientia*). In the latter time, peace allows an immense degree of maritime traffic, but those undertaking it are more concerned with commerce than the production and transmission of knowledge. In fact, this is not so much a contrast between the use of first- and second-hand knowledge, as it is a contrast between the means of transmission of second-hand knowledge to the geographical writer. Pliny discloses no desire to travel to see things himself; rather he wishes those people already travelling would be more concerned with knowledge and bring that knowledge back to him. Second-hand knowledge is adequate for the geographic writer, and perhaps even preferred to personal travel.⁵⁷ This fits well with the literary focus of Pliny's work.

Pliny was a well-read scholar who listed a formidable range of sources in his first book. That book functions as a table of contents for the rest of the work: he lists the subject material covered by each book and the sources from which his information derives.⁵⁸ That the entire first book is devoted to a lengthy accounting of his literary sources is in of itself a powerful argument for Pliny's prioritisation of secondary knowledge. He lists his sources for each of the books in his encyclopaedia separately, divided into Roman and foreign. For book 5, which covers Africa and Asia, he provides the following:

Ex Auctoribus: Agrippa. Suetonio Paulino. M. Varrone. Varrone Atacino. Cornelio Nepote. Hygino. L. Vetere. Mela. Domitio Corbulone. Licinio Muciano. Claudio Caesare. Arruntio. Livio filio. Seboso. actis triumphorum.

Externis: Iuba rege. Hecataeo. Hellanico. Damaste. Dicaearcho. Baetone. Timosthene. Philonide. Xenagora. Astynomo. Staphylo. Dionysio. Aristotele. Aristocrito. Ephoro. Eratosthene. Hipparcho. Panaetio. Serapione Antiocheno. Callimacho. Agathocle. Polybio. Timaeo mathematico. Herodoto. Myrsilo. Alexandro polyhistore. Metrodoro. Posidonio qui περιπλουν aut περιηγησιν. Sotade. Pyrrandro. Aristarcho Sicyonio. Eudoxo. Antigene. Callicrate. Xenophonte Lampsaceno. Diodoro Syracusano.

57 Pliny does occasionally refer to his own first-hand experience of certain natural phenomena. Some examples are discussed by Lloyd (1983) 136–38; Murphy (2004) 8–11.

58 The omission of Strabo is usually taken as evidence that his Geography was not widely known in the first century CE; however, another absence must cast doubt on that supposition. Woolf (2011) 10 notes the surprising omission of Sallust from Pliny's sources on Africa; there were certainly aspects of the *Bellum Iugurthinum* relevant to Pliny's presentation of the African provinces, even if Sallust's geographical presentation in that work was at times oddly incorrect (for example, *BI* 23.1 with Paul (1984) 83 and *BI* 92.3 with Paul (1984) 230; see also the brief note at Syme (1964) 152.

Hannone. Himilcone. Nymphodoro. Calliphane. Artemidoro. Megasthene. Isidoro. Cleobulo. Aristocreonte.⁵⁹

Neither section is arranged chronologically and both contain a wide variety of geographical, historical and scientific writers. Pliny includes many of Strabo's sources for book 16 in this list (Eratosthenes, Poseidonius ("Posidonio qui περιπλουν αυ περιγηγησιν") and Artemidorus) as well as other sources which Strabo used elsewhere (Hipparchus, Polybius and Megathenes). However, in his geographical books, Pliny seldom refers to his sources by name. As we shall see, where he does cite prior authorities, he prefers Romans or writers closely associated to the Romans, such as the Roman client king Juba (*Iuba rege*).

In fact, rather than Roman and foreign, it would be more accurate to say that Pliny divides the authors on which he relies into sources (*ex auctoribus*) and foreign sources (*externis*), where Roman authority is preferred and that *ex auctoribus externis* is relegated to subordinate status. This organisational principle is indicative of the work as a whole in which the world as conquered and organised by Roman authority is displayed before the eyes of the Imperial family, specifically the future *princeps* Titus to whom the work is dedicated.⁶⁰ Pliny's index is an impressive array of scholarship, in keeping with the younger Pliny's claims about his uncle's working habits.⁶¹ However, perhaps more important than their geographical writings, these names served as a powerful authorising claim for Pliny's work. Note in particular a number of sources at the very heart of the imperial structure: Marcus Agrippa, right hand man of Augustus; the emperor Claudius; Domitius Corbulo, Nero's great general; Licinius Mucianus, Vespasian's *amicus* who seized and governed Rome on his behalf in the civil war of 69 CE. Pliny also names the triumphal archives (*actis triumphorum*) as a geographical source. The sources for his sixth book are similarly impressive.⁶²

59 Pliny, *NH* 1, Libro v.

60 Pliny, *Praefatio*; Murphy (2004) 164. Murphy also argues that the index has an objectifying function: "Not only does the index announce the encyclopedia's universal scope and the laborious assembly of its sources, it is most impressive for showing how totally knowledge can be made into an object. It is a concrete demonstration of how referential shape can be imposed on the whole of nature, and a successful demarcation of the world into class and subclass: here everything is made indexible. The index is a textual analogy to the Natural History's use of the Roman triumphal procession as heuristic and analytical metaphor: both triumph and index make a thing known while at the same time signifying both the total availability and the total objectification of what is known." (p. 214).

61 Pliny, *Ep.* 3.5. But note Pliny the Younger's construction of Pliny the Elder, see Woolf (2011) n. 14.

62 Pliny, *NH* 1, Libro vi: Ex Auctoribus: M. Agrippa. M. Varrone. Varrone Atacino. Cornelio Nepote. Hygino. L. Vetere. Mela Pomponio. Domitio Corbulone. Licinio Muciano. Claudio

Pliny himself was firmly embedded in Roman imperial structures.⁶³ His equestrian career included military service on the Rhine frontier and probably multiple provincial procuratorships.⁶⁴ This experience gave him ample first-hand knowledge in the means and reality of Roman power at both the centre and periphery of the empire.⁶⁵ He spent his *otium* in writing works in support of the same imperial structures, as seen in his own writings and the testimony of his nephew.⁶⁶ This literary production adhered to a Roman logic of aristocratic literary exchange that saw the exchange of knowledge as a morally good demonstration of greatness and social alliance.⁶⁷ In Pliny's view, knowledge should be a shared possession of Roman citizens which contributes to their mastery of the environment.⁶⁸ His *Natural History* was as much a part of an imperialistic literary output as any of his works.⁶⁹

How, then, did Pliny use these sources? In his preface, Pliny discusses his engagement with his predecessors and how they used their source material:

You have evidence of my taste in that I have placed the names of my sources at the start of this volume. For in my opinion it is a good practice and full of noble modesty to acknowledge those through whom one makes progress, not to act as most of those I have come across do. [22] For I must let you know that I have compared authors and discovered

Caesare. Arruntio. Sebosio. Fabricio Tusco. T. Livio filio. Seneca. Nigidio. Externis: Iuba rege. Hecataeo. Hellanico. Damaste. Eudoxo. Dicaearchos. Baetone. Timosthene. Patrocle. Deomdamante. Clitarcho. Eratosthene. Alexandro Magno. Ephoro. Hipparcho. Panaetio. Callimacho. Artemidoro. Agathocle. Polybio. Timaeo Siculo. Alexandro polyhistore. Isidoro. Amometo. Metrodoro. Posidonio. Onesicrito. Nearcho. Megasthene. Diogneto. Aristocreon. Bione. Dalione. Simonide minore. Basile. Xenophonte Lampsaceno.

63 Murphy (2004) 2.

64 Pliny's military service in Germany: Syme (1969) 204–8. Syme discusses the evidence for the four procuratorships which have been proposed for Pliny (Narbonensis, Gallica Belgica, Africa and Tarraconensis), Syme (1969) 208–18, 224–27. Evidence for the first two is very weak, and that for Africa not much better; Tarraconensis seems secure.

65 Murphy (2004) 5.

66 Pliny the Younger lists his uncle's works in *Ep.* 3.5. They included a biography of a consular patron and works on history, military tactics, and the education of orators. Further biographical details can be found in *Ep.* 6.16, 6.20.

67 Murphy (2004) 49–73. For examples of knowledge as a gift, see Cic. *Brutus* (13–19); Pliny *Ep.* 9.33 (who gives a story about a dolphin which he took from his uncle's work at *NH* 9.26–8); Pliny *Ep.* 6.16 (the story of his uncle's death as a story given to Tacitus).

68 Pliny *NH* 25.1–2, 24.5; French (1994) 206–8.

69 Murphy (2004) 11: "The *Natural History* was never a pure vessel for transmitting knowledge, created in a vacuum for its own sake. It was an instance of knowledge given institutional form, for a purpose, created under particular social and political circumstances, and it still bears the marks of that creation."

from the most solemn recent authors have copied older works word for word ... [23] Certainly it takes a servile spirit and an ill-omened nature to prefer to be discovered in theft than to return a loan, especially when capital has been acquired from the interest.⁷⁰

Despite these objections in his preface, Pliny himself seldom refers to his sources in the geographical sections of his work. In the section on Syria (*NH* 5.66–90),⁷¹ he refers to his sources on two occasions: Herodotus and other unnamed writers (“quidam”) on the dimensions and location of the Sirbonian lake (*Sirbonis lacus*; now *Sabkhat al Bardawil* on the north coast of the Sinai Peninsula);⁷² and Domitius Corbulo and Licinius Mucianus on the source of the Euphrates.⁷³ In the section on Mesopotamia (*NH* 6.117–134),⁷⁴ Pliny mentions Nearchus, Onesicritus, Juba and other unnamed authorities, including Persian writers, on the length of the Euphrates.⁷⁵ Later, he describes Claudius Caesar’s account of the behaviour of a tributary of the Tigris.⁷⁶ Finally, amidst his description of Babylonia, Pliny gives the dimensions and relative location of Media, Parthia, Persis and Mesopotamia according to Marcus Agrippa.⁷⁷ Pliny’s model of aristocratic literary exchange placed citations of fellow Roman aristocrats at a higher value than others, and certainly above first-hand knowledge. Moreover, rather than specify the individual sources of each piece of his compiled geographical knowledge, Pliny credits them collectively (with occasional

70 Pliny *NH*. Pr.21–23: argumentum huius stomachi mei habebis quod in his voluminibus auctorum nomina praetexui. est enim benignum, ut arbitror, et plenum ingenui pudoris fateri per quos profeceris, non ut plerique ex iis, quos attigi, fecerunt. [22] scito enim conferentem auctores me deprehendisse a iuratissimis ex proximis veteres transcriptos ad verbum ... [23] Obnoxii profecto animi et infelicis ingenii est deprehendi in furto malle quam mutuum reddere, cum praesertim sors fiat ex usura.

71 Detlefsen (1909) 81–87.

72 Pliny *NH*. 5.68.

73 Pliny *NH*. 5.83. Detlefsen (1909) 86. As well as an important figure in contemporary politics, Licinius Mucianus (cos. III 74) was a major source on eastern marvels, Murphy (2004) 203–4.

74 Detlefsen (1909) 135–36.

75 Pliny, *NH*. 6.124: “Euphrate navigari Babylonem e Persico mari CCCCXII [m.]p. tradunt Nearchus et Onesicritus; qui vero postea scripsere, ad Seleuciam CCCCXL [m.p.]; Iuba a Babylone Characen CLXXV D [m.p.]. fluere aliqui ultra Babylona continuo alveo, prius quam distrahitur ad rigua, LXXXVII [m.p.], universo autem cursu XII [m.]p. inconstantiam mensurae diversitas auctorum facit, cum Persae quoque schoenos et parasangas alii alia mensura determinant.” For this passage: Detlefsen (1909) 135. For Pliny’s wide-ranging use of Juba: Detlefsen (1909) 164–65.

76 Pliny, *NH*. 6.128. Detlefsen (1909) 136.

77 Pliny, *NH*. 6.136–7. Detlefsen (1909) 136.

exceptions, often in cases of disagreement among his authorities), probably concealing just how much of his knowledge was derived *ex auctoribus externis*.

Of these cited sources, all are mentioned in the list in *NH* 1, except for Nearchus and Onesicritus. They are cited for the length of the Euphrates; perhaps Pliny found this citation in another of his sources.⁷⁸ Fragments providing distance information frequently occur like this in ancient geographical writing, as Pliny himself shows here and as can also be seen on many occasions in Strabo.⁷⁹ As with many of the Roman geographical writers, earlier scholars were sceptical of his methods; Syme noted Pliny's wide reading, but criticised him for hasty and insufficiently selective use of his sources.⁸⁰ However, recent works examining the project of the *Natural History* more closely have been more charitable. In his volume on Roman ethnographic thought, Woolf finds Pliny to be a deliberate and selective compiler and arranger of material.⁸¹ This can be seen in his arrangement of disparate geographic sources to form a coherent narrative of the Roman world.⁸²

Nevertheless, despite the Roman focus of Pliny's work, he was dependent on those foreign authorities for much of his information about the world, in particular the eastern regions. These regions had been comparatively well-documented by Hellenistic writers but had relatively recently entered the sphere of Roman interest and scholarship. Pliny refers to various Greek authors throughout his work, but he asserts the novelty of his own encyclopaedic project in his preface, noting there that no Greek had written an encyclopaedia.⁸³ He goes on to deride the flippant names and trivial contents of Greek works – the first of many jabs at Greek scientific thought.⁸⁴ Even so, his work attests to his reliance

78 Pliny, *NH* 6.96 = *BNJ* 133 F 13 suggests that Pliny did not consult Nearchus directly. Pliny says that Nearchus did not include staging posts and distances, but he did. (Whitby, 'Nearchus (133)', *BNJ*). Two other sources cited by Strabo also appear elsewhere in Pliny's *Natural History*. Poseidonios is cited by Pliny as an authority for books 2, 4, 5 (no explicit references), 6 (cited at 6.57), 11. Polyclitus of Larisa (4th C BCE) appears in Pliny's sources for books 12, 13, 31 (in the citation for books 12 and 13, he appears as Polykritos, which Jacoby considered a mistake, perhaps by Pliny himself, *FGrH* 128 T 2a; see also Plutarch, F 8; Pearson (1960) 70–77).

79 In addition to those already mentioned, see, for example, Strabo 16.3.5.

80 Syme (1969) 202.

81 Woolf (2011) 11.

82 In all, Pliny's use of sources resembles that of a contemporary work of popular history where the sources are hidden behind the text and seldom explicitly cited.

83 Pliny *NH* Pr.14.

84 Pliny *NH* Pr.24; French (1994) 218–19; on doctors, 223–225; and in a similar vein on Magi, 225–228. Wallace-Hadrill shows that Pliny's attitude towards Greek and Roman modes of scientific thought are closely related to his presentation and moralising on the antithesis between luxury and Nature, (1990) 92–96.

on Greek sources in every field.⁸⁵ Aristotle, Theophrastus and Democritus were particularly important.⁸⁶ Pliny's work was certainly influenced by Stoic philosophical writings, especially on matters of physics, although his conception of the universe as *aeternum, immensum, neque genitum neque interitum umquam* reveals that Stoicism was not his only source.⁸⁷ Pliny rarely refers to these Greek sources of knowledge in his geographical sections, but the material which comprises his descriptions of Mesopotamia reveals his dependence on them. In a sense, Pliny treats his foreign geographical sources as assumed knowledge not requiring precise citation. The specific details of earlier geographic research had become a possession of Roman scholarship. In this, Pliny's narrative geography is similar to Ptolemy's scientific tradition.

3 Ptolemy's Sources

Whereas the other extant Roman imperial geographic writers created works of narrative geography, Ptolemy participated in the scientific tradition associated with Alexandrian scholarship. His cultural background is unclear: he bore a Macedonian name of considerable prestige in an Egyptian context and worked in a multicultural metropolis at the height of the Roman Empire. His major source was Marinus of Tyre. From his toponymic, Marinus' origin was the region of Phoenicia, but Ptolemy is silent on further details. His name was probably Latin.⁸⁸ Ptolemy's choice of Greek to transmit his scholarship indicates his adherence to the Hellenistic scientific tradition, as does his method. Ptolemy constructed his work through the accumulation of knowledge, explicitly correcting and supplementing the work of his predecessor Marinus, rather than substituting and selectively arranging material from a variety of sources to construct a geographical narrative. To the extent that Marinus did the same, we can speak of Ptolemy's participation in a tradition of knowledge: a process which prioritised the accretion and sedimentation of geographical facts rather than a selective process of narrative construction. Before embarking on an

85 The chapters of a conference volume on Plinian science attest to this reliance: French and Greenaway (1986).

86 French (1994) 220–23.

87 Pliny *NH* 2.1: “permanent, boundless, which was neither created, nor will ever be destroyed”. Lapidge (1989) 1411–12; Wallace-Hadrill (1990) 84; Beagon (1992) 26–54; French (1994) 198–201; Healy (1999) 71–78, 106–112; Paparazzo (2011). For the Stoic conception of a cyclical universe ending and reborn in destruction, see the sources assembled by Long and Sedley (1987) 1.274–279, 2.271–277.

88 Although Dilke (1985) 72 suggests it could have been Greek, Latin, or Aramaic.

exploration of the accumulation of knowledge through sedimentation, I shall discuss Ptolemy's explicit attitude towards the sources of that knowledge.

Ptolemy is forthright about his major source, the late first century CE geographer Marinus of Tyre, although that scholar's sources are obscure.⁸⁹

Marinus of Tyre seems to be the latest [author] in our time to have undertaken this subject, and he has done it with absolute diligence. He has clearly laid his hands on numerous records of research besides those that had come to knowledge still earlier, and treated those of nearly all his predecessors with care, giving appropriate correction to everything that he found that either they or he himself, at first, had trusted without good reason, as can be seen from his publications of the geographical map [τοῦ γεωγραφικοῦ πίνακος], which are numerous.⁹⁰

Ptolemy notes that Marinus had many sources and implies a process of selection and aggregation among them. He does not discuss the nature of these sources, but his implicit statement that the geographic writer must place trust in them (πεπιστευμένα) recalls Strabo's distinction between information gathered through autopsy and that gathered through trusting (πιστεύσαντες).⁹¹ Ptolemy does not explicitly develop the contrast between these sources of geographic knowledge (although evidence that Marinus used both will be discussed below), although he does imply that this trust is fallible. Ptolemy explains that Marinus' method was primarily corrective (ἐπανορθώσεως) because sometimes a geographical writer would place unsuitable trust in their sources of information (ὅσα μὴ προσηκόντως ἐτύγχανε πεπιστευμένα καὶ ὑπ' ἐκείνων καὶ ὑφ' αὐτοῦ τὸ πρῶτον). Marinus corrected both the work of his predecessors (ὑπ' ἐκείνων) and his own earlier work (ὑφ' αὐτοῦ τὸ πρῶτον).

Ptolemy's knowledge that Marinus' method included self-correction suggests that Ptolemy had access to several iterations of Marinus' publications. Ptolemy notes that Marinus revised his "map" (πίναξ) many times (τῆς τοῦ γεωγραφικοῦ πίνακος διορθώσεως πλείονων οὐσῶν). It is unclear what form this map took. The maps which accompany Ptolemy's manuscripts were probably

89 Gärtner, 'Marinus', *BNP*; Berggren and Jones (2000) 23–25; Dilke (1985) 72–75, 77.

90 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.6.1: Δοκεῖ δὴ Μαρῖνος ὁ Τύριος ὕστατός τε τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς καὶ μετὰ πάσης σπουδῆς ἐπιβαλεῖν τῷ μέρει τούτῳ· φαίνεται γὰρ καὶ πλείοσιν ἱστορίαις περιπεπωκώς παρὰ τὰς ἔτι ἄνωθεν εἰς γνῶσιν ἔλθούσας, καὶ τὰς πάντων σχεδὸν τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ μετ' ἐπιμελείας διειληφώς, ἐπανορθώσεως τε τῆς δεούσης ἀξιώσας, ὅσα μὴ προσηκόντως ἐτύγχανε πεπιστευμένα καὶ ὑπ' ἐκείνων καὶ ὑφ' αὐτοῦ τὸ πρῶτον, ὡς ἐκ τῶν ἐκδόσεων αὐτοῦ τῆς τοῦ γεωγραφικοῦ πίνακος διορθώσεως πλείονων οὐσῶν ἔνεστι σκοπεῖν. Translation Berggren and Jones (2000).

91 Strabo 2.5.11, see above.

drawn from Ptolemy's data in the Middle Ages.⁹² Ptolemy states that Marinus did not have time to draw a map to accompany the final version of his work.⁹³ From Ptolemy's subsequent statements that drawing such a map would have been the only way to correct certain errors which Ptolemy goes on to explain and correct, we may assume that Ptolemy did draw such a map, but if it was published with his work, the original has been lost. Ptolemy may be using πῖναξ in the sense of a register or list (Lat. *album*) to refer to Marinus' catalogue of geographical coordinates rather than in the sense of a completed map with those same sites located in a two-dimensional plane. If so, Marinus' πῖναξ was a guide to constructing a projected map; the term could also describe Ptolemy's text. Whatever it was that Marinus was revising, Ptolemy saw himself as continuing that iterative process of revision:

Now if we saw no defect in his final compilation, we would content ourselves with making the map of the *oikoumene* on the basis of these writings alone, without taking any more trouble with it. Since, however, even he turns out to have given assent to certain things that have not been creditably established, and in many respects not to have given due thought to the method of map-making, with a view either to convenience or to the preservation of proportionality, we have justifiably been induced to contribute as much as we think necessary to the man's work to make it more logical and easier to use. We will do this as concisely as possible, starting with a brief examination of each kind of thing that needs some comment.⁹⁴

In Ptolemy's judgement, Marinus did not correct his own work sufficiently: he was overly trusting in some instances (ἀξιοπίστου συγκατατεθειμένος) and did not sufficiently consider the theoretical aspects of map-making (τὴν ἔφοδον τῆς καταγραφῆς). As far as we can tell from his comments in book one of his *Geography*, Ptolemy seems to have reserved his criticism for mathematical

92 Berggren and Jones (2000) 45–50.

93 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.17.1, 1.18.3.

94 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.6.2–3: “Ἄλλ’ εἰ μὲν ἐωρῶμεν μηδὲν ἐνδέον αὐτοῦ τῇ τελευταίᾳ συντάξει, καὶ ἀπῆρκεσεν ἡμῖν ἀπὸ τούτων μόνων τῶν ὑπομνημάτων ποιείσθαι τὴν τῆς οἰκουμένης καταγραφὴν μηδὲν τι περιεργαζομένους· ἐπεὶ δὲ φαίνεται καὶ αὐτὸς ἐνίοις τε μὴ μετὰ καταλήψεως ἀξιοπίστου συγκατατεθειμένος καὶ ἔτι περὶ τὴν ἔφοδον τῆς καταγραφῆς πολλαχὴ μῆτε τοῦ προχείρου μῆτε τοῦ συμμετρου τὴν δέουσαν πρόνοιαν πεποιημένος, εἰκότως προήχθημεν, ὅσον ὥμεθα δεῖν, τῇ τάνδρῳ πραγματείᾳ συνεισενεγκεῖν ἐπὶ τὸ εὐλογώτερον καὶ εὐχρηστότερον. [3] Καὶ δὴ τοῦτο ποιήσομεν ἀπερίττως, ὥς ἔνι μάλιστα, προεπισκεψάμενοι διὰ βραχέων ἐκάτερον εἶδος τῶν ὀφειλόντων λόγου τινὸς τυχεῖν.” Translation Berggren and Jones (2000).

matters, although he did make some corrections to account for the better state of knowledge of certain areas in his time.⁹⁵

Unfortunately, Marinus' sources are not clear from Ptolemy's description of his work. Ptolemy notes that the coordinate data which he includes came from surveying (τόγεωμετρικόν) and astronomical observation (τόμετεωροσκοπικόν).⁹⁶ However, Ptolemy's criticism of his predecessor's method of calculating the size of the *oikumene* shows that Marinus made use of distance information derived from movement. Ptolemy reports on a pair of distance measurements between the Euphrates and the Stone Tower and from the Stone Tower to the capital of the Seres which Marinus obtained from travellers.⁹⁷ Ptolemy includes the name which Marinus reported for the source of this information, one Maes Titianus, specifically noted to be Macedonian but also bearing an Aramaic name.⁹⁸ Thus Marinus, and ultimately Ptolemy, used a combination

95 He spends much of his first book correcting Marinus' latitude and longitude calculations (1.7–14), certain topological details (1.15–16), and his predecessor's simplistic rectangular projection which failed to account for the curvature of the earth (1.18, 1.20; Neugebauer (1975) 879–92). He also updated the transmitted data for regions which were better known in Ptolemy's time (1.17).

96 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.2.

97 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.11.3: "Τὴν δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκτεθειμένης τοῦ Εὐφράτου διαβάσεως μέχρι τοῦ Λιθίνου Πύργου διάστασιν συναγομένην κατ' αὐτὸν σχοίωνων ὀκτακοσίων ἐβδομήκοντα ἕξ, σταδίων δὲ διςμυρίων ἑξακισχιλίων διακοσίων ὀγδοήκοντα, καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ Λιθίνου Πύργου μέχρι Σήρας τῆς τῶν Σηρῶν μητροπόλεως, ὁδοῦ μὲν μηνῶν ἑπτὰ, σταδίων δὲ τρισμυρίων ἑξακισχιλίων διακοσίων, ὥς ἐπὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ παραλλήλου, συναιρούμεν ἑκατέραν κατὰ τὴν ἐπιβάλλουσαν διόρθωσιν, ἐπειδὴ περ ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρων μὲν τῶν ὁδῶν φαίνεται μὴ μειώσας τὸ παρὰ τὰς ἐκτροπὰς πλεονάζον, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς δευτέρας ἔτι καὶ ταῖς αὐταῖς ἀλογίαις περιπεπτωκώς, αἷς καὶ κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν Γαραμάντων ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀγίσυμβά χώραν." (However, we reduce according to the appropriate correction both the distance from that crossing of the Euphrates to the Stone Tower, which amounts (according to [Marinus]) to 876 schoinoi or 26,280 stades, and that from the Stone Tower to Sera, the metropolis of the Seres, a journey of seven months [ὁδοῦ μὲν μηνῶν ἑπτὰ], or [according to Marinus] 36,200 stades reckoned on the same parallel [through Rhodes]. For in the case of both journeys [τῶν ὁδῶν], [Marinus] had clearly not subtracted the excess resulting from diversions [τὰς ἐκτροπὰς], and in the case of the second, he has fallen as well into the same illogicalities that he also fell into concerning the journey [τὴν ὁδὸν] from the people of Garama to Agisymba.) Translation Berggren and Jones (2000).

98 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.11.5–6: "καὶ γὰρ δι' ἐμπορίας ἀφορμὴν ἐγνώσθη. [6] Μάην γάρ φησί τινα τὸν καὶ Τιτιανόν, ἄνδρα Μακεδόνα καὶ ἐκ πατρὸς ἔμπορον, συγγράψασθαι τὴν ἀναμέτρησιν οὐδ' αὐτὸν ἐπελθόντα, διαπεμφάμενον δὲ τινος πρὸς τοὺς Σήρας." (Moreover, it was because of the opportunity for commerce that [the route] came to be known. Marinus says that one Maes, also known as Titianus, a Macedonian and a merchant by family tradition, recorded the distance measurements, though he did not traverse it himself but sent certain [others] to the Seres.) Translation Berggren and Jones (2000). For discussion of this route, see Chapter 6. For further discussion of this episode, see Andrade (2015).

of Hellenistic science and practical route information obtained through physical movement through space.

As noted earlier, the basis of Ptolemy's method was accumulative. He began with an already formed body of information (Marinus' catalogue) and produced his own work by addition and correction. In this method, past knowledge became anonymised layers of intellectual sediment available for future intellectual producers to build upon. This differed from authors like Strabo (and possibly Marinus himself) who gathered information from various sources and constructed a new narrative by selection and substitution. The kind of sedimentation of geographical knowledge practised by Ptolemy was possible because of the slow rate of change of physical geography; for example, at the scale at which the Roman geographical writers were examining, the course of the Euphrates was a constant throughout the period. Authors like Strabo, whose work was concerned at least as much with ethnography, history, and human interaction with the environment as it was with physical geography, made more use of selective and substitutive techniques. Even so, the founding of cities and the movement of population groups was usually a slow process. Nicolet describes the period of geographical writing between Eratosthenes and Ptolemy as "filling in a picture whose outlines were already traced."⁹⁹ Periods of conflict and discovery expanded the well-known and measured zone, sometimes explosively, as during the period of Alexander's conquests, but often slowly from the accounts of individual travellers or by events of a much smaller scope, such as the greater knowledge of Dacia which followed Trajan's campaigns. Otherwise, new information about the internal geography of the known world amounted to corrections of prior mistakes and changes in human geography. Because Marinus only survives through Ptolemy, we have no access to any geographical changes that may have occurred between the two authors. However, Ptolemy's explicit comments about Marinus' processes of correction and revision show that Ptolemy's major contribution to the body of knowledge assembled by his predecessor was corrective.

Something of this approach can be seen in Pliny's treatment of his foreign geographical sources. The bulk of his work contains references to and citations of the foreign sources on which so much of his basic geographic information relied, but in the geographical chapters he overwhelmingly refers to Roman sources. In treating his sources this way, Pliny presents Hellenistic knowledge as an accumulated sediment of anonymised knowledge within which individual contributions need not or should not be distinguished. This focuses attention on the changes which have occurred in recent times and the corrections

99 Nicolet (1991) 63–64.

which that earlier material required, provided by Roman exploration, conquest and description.

4 Spatial Measurement

Rome and Greece had separate traditions of spatial measurement. The Roman tradition is seen in the methods of the Roman surveyors known as *agrimensores*.¹⁰⁰ These were responsible for the spatial organisation of new urban foundations and the division of agricultural land into individual allocations, known as centuriation. Although the division of land according to mathematical methods had been practised elsewhere in the Mediterranean and the Near East before Rome's widespread foundation of colonies, centuriation was a specifically Roman practice that had much in common with the systems of spatial division practised by Roman augurs in observing bird flight, including the shared use of certain technical terms.¹⁰¹ Centuriation was a precise and ordered system suitable for land measurement on a local scale where sight lines could be employed and the curvature of the earth would not substantially effect the precision of measurement. It was less applicable to broad geographical description and does not appear to have influenced geographical works at that scale in a technical manner.¹⁰²

A tradition of spatial description more important for Roman geographic writing was the linear, or hodological, approach to space. This conception of space as a series of points which could be described in a list or drawn as a line is conditioned by the experience of space as a medium of movement and travel. In the Roman context, the linear experience of space is usually discussed in terms of long-distance travel and the itinerary genre. A number of volumes of collected papers discuss the practicalities and experiences of travel in the Roman Empire.¹⁰³ The studies contained in those volumes consider evidence of travel and movement from a wide range of sources, but the most direct insight into Roman concepts of "travel directions" are the various itineraries which survive. The most detailed itinerary relevant to the Mesopotamian

¹⁰⁰ Dilke (1971) esp. 31–34.

¹⁰¹ Purcell (1990) 15; Dilke (1971) 32–33, 86f.

¹⁰² Some technical concepts from centuriation were applied on a broader scale in geographical descriptions. Livy twice uses the term *cardo* to demarcate mid-republican maritime space (40.18; 41.1.3), Purcell (1990) 18. The influence of Roman spatial organisation instead appears in the desire to represent space in relation to and oriented towards Rome and Roman power.

¹⁰³ Adams and Laurence (2001); Talbert and Brodersen (2004); Adams and Roy (2007). See also G.R. Parker (2002) 80–84; G.R. Parker (2006).

Borderland is the *Parthian Stations* by Isodore of Charax.¹⁰⁴ This is a Greek text of the late first century BCE describing the route from Zeugma to Alexandropolis in Arachosia, of which the most detailed section describes the route between Zeugma and Seleucia on the Tigris.¹⁰⁵ One of the most important itineraries for study of empire-wide routes is the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti* (the *Antonine Itinerary*).¹⁰⁶ This document seems to be a compilation of smaller itineraries compiled at some point in the late third century.¹⁰⁷ Finally, the *Tabula Peutingeriana* was an illustrated itinerary (*itineraria picta*) resembling a distorted map.¹⁰⁸ The extant version was made in the thirteenth century, but seems to have been based on Imperial itineraries revised several times, including at last c. 300 CE.¹⁰⁹

The scale of the hodological approach to space was more applicable to the kind of distances used in Roman geographic texts. Although this approach came to be seen widely in Roman contexts, its genesis was not specifically Roman. An itinerary is essentially a geographically ordered list. Writing as a technology is particularly conducive to conveying information in this form.¹¹⁰ Many genres of Babylonian writing were composed as lists.¹¹¹ Scribes composed itineraries of the military expeditions of the Assyrian kings.¹¹² The Greek *periplus* genre, probably beginning with the *Periplus* of Scylax, comprised works describing coastal sailing voyages.¹¹³ According to Herodotus, Scylax of Caryanda sailed down the Indus and back to the Isthmus of Suez at the behest of Darius I; Hecataeus quoted fragments of a work he wrote, but it is

104 Schoff (1989); Millar (1993) 120–21.

105 Isidore 1.

106 Cuntz (1929). A second volume edited by Schnetz (1940) covers the *Ravenna Cosmography* and the *Geographia* of Guido of Pisa.

107 Perhaps around 280–90 CE, Dilke (1987) 235–36; Salway (2001) 39–43.

108 For *itineraria picta*, see Brodersen (2001). But note Salway's doubts as to whether the *Tabula Peutingeriana* counts as such, (2001) 31–32. A digitised version of the *Tabula* is available online at <http://www.cambridge.org/us/talbert/index.html> [accessed 29 April 2016].

109 Talbert argues that the map reflects a Diocletianic worldview: Talbert (2010) 133–36. The older view was for a fourth century date: Dilke (1987) 238. There is much debate over the status of the Peutinger Table, against Dilke's rather uncomplicated view of the Table as a map in the modern sense, see Brodersen (2001); Talbert (2010).

110 Goody (1986) 36–41, 54–55; Goody (2000) 146. Goody reports that lists are one of the first forms of writing to be adopted by oral societies, (1987) 211–12. For the use of lists and categorisation in Roman intellectual writing of the late Republic, see MacRae (2016) 32–33.

111 Beaulieu (2007); Dillery (2015) 56–58.

112 Fales (1995); Liverani (1995); Kühne (1995).

113 For example the *Periplus* of Hanno, *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, and *Periplus* of Scylax: Dueck (2012) 6–7.

not otherwise extant.¹¹⁴ A late antique periplus of the Black Sea provides a useful insight into the variety of approaches that such writers could take. The anonymous *Periplus Ponti Euxini* is a compilation mainly of three works: an edition of the *Periplus* of Menippus of Pergamon, Arrian's *Periplus Ponti Euxini*, and an anonymous *periegesis* addressed to King Nicomedes (Ps-Scymnus, *ad Nicomedem regem*).¹¹⁵ Menippus' *Periplus* was a bare listing of stations around the coast and distances between them.¹¹⁶ Arrian's *Periplus* supplemented the basic framework of the coastal voyage with more detailed information about the places mentioned.¹¹⁷ Ps-Scymnus gave a verse description without distances, mentioning only the best known stations but including descriptions of the hinterland as well as historical and descriptive information.¹¹⁸ Not only were *periploi* and travellers' accounts a significant body of literature in their own right, but they were an important method of structuring particular portions of narratives within larger works. Strabo in particular used the linear order provided by rivers and coastlines to structure his narrative; however, he did not use this technique in his description of Mesopotamia.¹¹⁹ Pliny also structured parts of his narrative in this way, including his itinerary-like description of sites along the Euphrates in book 5 and his itinerary fragment from Zeugma to the Roman border in book 6.¹²⁰ This hodological approach could give structure to a geographical narrative, but it could also be a source of information on the distances between places.

With the exception of dedicated itineraries, linear distance measurements appear relatively rarely in ancient descriptive geographies. Such measurements were based on either geometric calculation or hodological travel narratives. Most of Strabo's measurements seem to be derived from his written sources, whose information in turn was based on a combination of earlier writing, travellers reports or geometric calculation based on astronomical calculation. Strabo gives measurements derived from Hellenistic sources as well as distances derived from travel. At the start of his description of Mesopotamia, he provides distances between Zeugma, Thapsacus and Babylon:

114 Hdt. 4.44. A 4th C BCE periplus that bears his name may be a compilation of various accounts of explorations, Shipley (2011).

115 Diller (1952) 102–46.

116 Menippus' *Periplus* was probably written in the late first century BCE, Diller (1952) 147–48.

117 On the structure of Arrian's *Periplus*, see Rood (2011) 139–42.

118 Skymnos of Chios wrote a lost geographical survey in the first half of the second century BCE, this poetic treatment was probably composed in the early first century BCE.

119 Dueck (2000) 40–43.

120 Both are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The shape of Mesopotamia projects to a considerable length and resembles a boat. The Euphrates forms the greatest part of its periphery. From Thapsacus to Babylon, as Eratosthenes states, is 4800 stadia; and from the Zeugma at Commagene, where Mesopotamia begins, it is not less than 2000 stadia to Thapsacus.¹²¹

He credits Eratosthenes as the source of the distance measurements, but as an earlier passage makes clear, that scholar is also the source of the description of Mesopotamia as shaped like a boat (πλοῖω πως ἔοικε). In a passage from book 2, Strabo paraphrases Eratosthenes at length, including on the distance between Thapsacus and Babylon (“For he says that from the crossing at Thapsacus along the Euphrates to Babylon is four thousand eight hundred stadia ...”), and directly quotes his metaphor for the shape of Mesopotamia, although with a different object as the comparison: (““So it happens,” he says, ‘that the shape of Mesopotamia and Babylonia is like a rower’s cushion (ὕπηρεσις).’ Such are things Eratosthenes has said.”).¹²² In both of these passages, Strabo attributes to Eratosthenes the distance of 4800 stadia between Babylon and Thapsacus. In book 16, Strabo does not cite a source for his comparison of shapes, but in book 2 he also attributes the comparison itself to Eratosthenes. Strabo’s conception of the relationship between the two words and shapes (πλοῖω and ὕπηρεσις) is unclear, as is the specific meaning and shape of a ὕπηρέσιον.¹²³ Regardless, it is clear that Strabo’s analogic technique of describing the shapes of regions by metaphorical comparison was derived from Eratosthenes.¹²⁴ Based on the extant fragments, it seems that most of Eratosthenes’ dimensions were derived from travel distance calculations rather than astronomical

121 Strabo 16.1.22: ‘Ἐπὶ μῆκος δὲ συχνὸν προπέπτωκεν ἡ συναγωγὴ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας καὶ πλοῖω πως ἔοικε· ποιεῖ δὲ τὸ πλεῖστον τῆς περιφερείας ὁ Εὐφράτης· καὶ ἔστι τὸ μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς Θαψάκου μέχρι Βαβυλῶνος, ὡς εἴρηκεν Ἐρατοσθένης, τετρακισχίλιοι καὶ ὀκτακόσιοι στάδιοι· τὸ δ’ ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ Κομμαγενὴν ζεύγματος, ἥπερ ἐστὶν ἀρχὴ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας, οὐκ ἔλαττον τῶν δισχιλίων σταδίων ἕως ἐπὶ Θάψακον.

122 Strabo 2.1.26: ἀπὸ γὰρ τῆς κατὰ Θάψακόν φησι διαβάσεως παρὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην εἰς μὲν Βαβυλῶνα σταδίους εἶναι τετρακισχιλίους ὀκτακοσίους... “γίνεται δὲ” φησί “τὸ σχῆμα τῆς Μεσοποταμίας καὶ Βαβυλωνίας ὕπηρεσιν παραπλήσιον.” ὁ μὲν δὲ Ἐρατοσθένης τοιαύτ’ εἴρηκε.

123 Liddel and Scott gives a secondary definition of ὕπηρέσιον as ὑπηρετικὸν πλοῖον (dispatch boat) based seemingly on this passage alone. Roller (2010) 186, 190 presumes that a ὕπηρέσιον is crescent shaped and that Strabo’s use of πλοῖω at 16.1.21 is a misunderstanding of Eratosthenes. Biffi (2002) 164 thinks that Strabo’s πλοῖω πως ἔοικε at 16.1.22 refers to the part of the boat on which the rower’s cushions are arranged. For the probable mechanics of such a cushion, see Hale (1996).

124 On the shape of the oikumene as a cloak (*chlamys*): Strabo 2.5.6, 2.5.9, 11.11.7. Dueck (2000) 44.

observation.¹²⁵ While these fragments may be selective, they nevertheless reflect the knowledge Strabo obtained from Eratosthenes and his tradition.

The distance measurements provided by Pliny are all based on travel. His description of the route down the Euphrates in book 5 includes distances in Roman miles between the cataracts of the Euphrates in the Taurus and Samosata, between Samosata and Zeugma, and between Zeugma and Masice in Babylonia.¹²⁶ These measurements are separated by itinerary-like lists of sites and peoples and by an aside on Palmyra and the desert cities to the south. Taken together, these three measurements make a contiguous journey between Samosata and Masice, the first major city of Babylonia. This hints at a common source for the distances; Pliny was adept at disguising lists by splicing together multiple sources.¹²⁷ The description of Palmyra, which Pliny places amidst this Euphrates itinerary, also includes a number of distance measurements which connect that city with other sites of commercial significance in both Roman and Parthian space:

[Palmyra] is distant 337 miles from Seleucia of the Parthians, generally known as Seleucia on the Tigris, 203 from the nearest part of the Syrian coast, and 27 less from Damascus.¹²⁸

These distances reflect the trade routes connecting Palmyra with Babylonia, the nearby major city of Damascus, and the Mediterranean shipping networks that reached out to the rest of the Roman world. The alternative method for deriving distance measurements like this would be through scientific measurement of coordinate data and geometric calculation. However, the urbanisation of the Palmyrene oasis also dates to the Roman period. Evidence for Hellenistic Palmyra is slim but shows no signs of the widespread trade activity like that which it conducted under the Roman occupation of Syria. There is little reason why such an unimportant location would be noted in coordinate charts of the Hellenistic period or used as a major marker for long distance measurements by Hellenistic mathematicians. Instead, these distances reflect the movement of long distance traders in the early imperial period, shortly before Pliny's time.¹²⁹

125 On Eratosthenes' sources, see Roller (2010) 16–20. At 2.5.24, Strabo cites Eratosthenes use of the shadow cast by a gnomon (διὰ τῶν σκιοθηρικῶν γνώμωνων) to correct distances reported by sailors, Roller (2010) 210.

126 Pliny *NH* 5.85, 86, 90.

127 For example, Pliny *NH* 5.81–82. See Chapter 4.

128 Pliny *NH* 5.88: “abest ab Seleucia Parthorum, quae vocatur Ad Tigrim, CCCXXXVII [m.]p., a proximo vero Syriae litore CCIII et a Damasco XXVII propius.”

129 For a full discussion of Palmyra and Palmyrene commercial links, see Chapter 6.

In book 6, Pliny includes a section of an itinerary leading from Zeugma to the Roman border (*terminus Romani imperi*) at Oruros.¹³⁰ Except for Zeugma itself, the locations in this list are obscure and unmentioned by other geographical sources. This, along with the inclusion of a distance measurement between the only two locations on the list important to Roman space (Zeugma and the Roman border), suggest a Roman source. The explicit notice of Pompey's border further suggests that Pliny or a secondary source found this segment in the campaign reports of a Roman general, probably those of Pompey himself. There is little reason to suspect that any of Pompey's successors in the region would glorify his achievement of establishing a *termini* so far to the east of the Euphrates, especially when that river was proudly proclaimed as the border by Augustan propaganda.¹³¹ Pliny directly quoted the *acta triumphorum* as the source for his discussions of aspects of Pompey's triumph later in the *Natural History*.¹³² Those records are a likely source for Pliny's description of the border established by Pompey, but of the sources he lists in *NH* 1, any of Cornelius Nepos, M. Varro, or Livy are also possible.

5 Hellenistic Knowledge

One legacy of Alexander's campaigns was the wide distribution of Macedonian and Greek colonies throughout the space occupied by his ephemeral empire. The lasting mark that this colonialization left on the landscape will be discussed in Chapter 4. The consolidation of this space into Hellenistic kingdoms through the continuing processes of Macedonian colonisation and the development of royal control spread Hellenic culture widely, but also provided the conditions for the concentration of the new forms and systems of knowledge in royal centres, such as at the library at Alexandria. The origin of Hellenistic culture in Greece and Macedonia meant that the Mediterranean remained the

130 Pliny *NH* 6.119–120: “Dicta est et in Zeugmate Apamea, ex qua orientem petentes excipit oppidum Caphrena munitum, quondam stadiorum LXX amplitudine et satraparum regia appellatum, quo tributa conferebantur, nunc in arcem redactum. [120] Durant, ut fuere, Thebata et, ductu Pompei Magni terminus Romani imperi, Oruros, a Zeugmate L·CC [m.p.].” (Apamea at Zeugma has been mentioned also, from which, heading east, one comes to Caphrena, a fortified town, formerly seventy stadia in size and called the “Palace of the Satraps.” Tribute used to be brought here; now it is just a fortress. [120] Thebata is still in the same state as formerly, and Oruros, the limit of Roman power under Pompeius Magnus, 250 miles from Zeugma.) For a discussion of this passage and sites it describes, see Chapter 4.

131 Strabo 16.1.28. See Chapter 6.

132 Pliny *NH* 7.97–98; 37.12–19. So too did Diodorus (40.4).

focus, at least partially, of many of the Hellenistic kingdoms and drew much of this Hellenistic knowledge into what would become the Roman sphere.¹³³

The geographical writers of the Roman Empire inherited the systems of organising and constructing knowledge from their Hellenistic predecessors, as well as the raw geographical material organised and created by the Macedonian colonial project. Although the Roman authors constructed geographies centred on Rome and Roman power, this Hellenistic material formed the basis of their geographic works. Strabo and Ptolemy consciously placed themselves in, and appealed to, the intellectual authority of the Hellenistic tradition through specific references to Greek geographers like Eratosthenes, Posidonius, Hipparchus and Marinus. Pliny prioritised Roman sources of knowledge, but his geography of Mesopotamia reflects a foundation in Hellenistic intellectual production. Pliny explicitly claims his authority through his use of Roman sources; however, at least in his descriptions of the Roman Near East, his material constantly calls to mind the Hellenistic foundation of his work. Other local and foreign sources of knowledge can be occasionally seen in these texts but are largely subsumed within the Hellenistic intellectual project.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, these authors used and adapted Hellenistic knowledge to create a Roman perspective on the Mesopotamian Borderland. To do so, they selectively drew on these sources. Strabo chose his sources carefully, engaging only with those he considered the highest quality, such as Eratosthenes and Poseidonius. A comparison between the two versions of the drowning of Tryphon's army, one directly cited from Poseidonius by Athenaios and the other derived from Poseidonius, but not credited as such by Strabo, shows that Strabo was willing and able to use and rearrange the best sources to construct a narrative emphasising elements of his choice. Pliny's smooth and consistent construction of Syrian geography without reference to any of his Greek sources shows his skill at selection, aggregation and arrangement of a consistent narrative. In the sphere of geography, as elsewhere, Hellenistic knowledge became an authority to be drawn on selectively in order to constitute and reinforce a Roman perspective on space, history and imperial power.¹³⁵

133 In the case of the Seleucid Empire, the cultural pull of Macedonia, conflicts with western successor states like Ptolemaic Egypt, and military failures on the Iranian plateau meant that Antioch on the Orontes remained an important site of royal activity even when Seleucia on the Tigris was a more important centre for the empire as a whole. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993).

134 As we will see in Chapter 4, Strabo makes different use of that Assyrian past, but he highlights the Macedonians influence on the landscape of Assyria by frequent reference to Alexander.

135 Other spheres in which Greek cultural authority was adapted to Roman purposes are discussed by Gruen (1990) 79–123; Habinek (1998).

Naming

The term “Mesopotamia” has a varied and complicated history. In modern scholarship, particularly in the field of archaeology, the entire area between and around the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, from the Taurus Mountains to the Persian Gulf, receives the name “Mesopotamia.” The northern half, where settled cultivation did not spread far beyond the Taurus or the rivers and where much of the land between those cultivated zones was desert, is known as northern or upper Mesopotamia. The southern half, where a much greater proportion of the area between the rivers was cultivatable, or was made so by canals, is called southern or lower Mesopotamia. The spectacular sites and artefacts of Babylon, Sumer and Ur have firmly attached the term “Mesopotamia” to this southern region in the popular imagination. Because of this modern association, archaeologists of northern Mesopotamia often use the term the Jazira (from the Arabic *al-Jazira*, the Island) for the dry, northern region. Like “Mesopotamia”, Jazira refers to the physical characteristics of the space as surrounded by the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris. Also like the word Mesopotamia, “Jazira” is a term with several different spatial definitions in different periods of Islamic rule.¹ “Mesopotamia” was not an objective term.

Each section in this chapter views “Mesopotamia” through two lenses: definitional and contextual. What does the author signify by the term Mesopotamia? How does the author contextualise the signified space within their broader geographical narrative?

Greek and Roman geographic writers conceived of Mesopotamia in a variety of ways. Some used “Mesopotamia” as a geographical term to refer to the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers which lay south of the Taurus Mountains and north of Babylonia. The conception of the northern and southern boundaries of the space varied from text to text. The term never extended into the Anatolian plateau, but sometimes included the southern foothills of the Taurus Mountains. While it was occasionally used to refer to the entire zone all the way south to the Persian Gulf, that southern part of the region was more commonly referred to as Babylonia. This chapter analyses what each of the geographical writers meant when they wrote “Mesopotamia” and how that space fit into their broader understanding of the region.

1 Brauer (1995); Moore et al. (2000); Akkermans and Schwartz (2002).

Each author constructed, delimited and denominated “Mesopotamia” in relation to similar geographic units. Strabo’s detailed descriptive geography of the land inhabited by “the Assyrians” included all of the Mesopotamian Borderland, as well as the adjacent areas of Roman and Parthian space. Pliny describes the Mesopotamian Borderland in two overlapping sections focusing on Roman and Parthian space respectively. Ptolemy’s mathematical geography represents the world primarily through scientific calculation, including precisely defined sections covering the space of the Mesopotamian Borderland in a geographical manner. The *Expositio Totius Mundi* divides the borderland according to administrative structures: Roman provincial organisation and Persian dominion. Finally, the surviving books of Ammianus Marcellinus’ imperial history include several dedicated geographic descriptions, as well as many geographical references and asides which situate the Mesopotamian events of his historical narrative securely in a region very familiar to him. The sections proceed chronologically, beginning with our most detailed source, Strabo.

1 Strabo’s Assyria

In book 16 of his *Geography*, Strabo describes the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent. He gives this latter area the name οἱ Ἀσσύριοι, thus using an ethnic term for the people of the area as a substantive for the space itself, “the land of the Assyrians”. Strabo’s οἱ Ἀσσύριοι encompassed an area from the Persian Gulf, up the basin of the Tigris and Euphrates as far as the Taurus range, west up to Phoenicia and Judaea, and included the Mesopotamian Borderland (see Map 3.1).² Strabo begins by defining οἱ Ἀσσύριοι according to the people and places which lay within it:

The Assyrians lie next to Persis and Susiana. They call Babylonia and much of the country all round by this name, which in part is Atouria, in which is Ninus, and Apolloniatis, the Elymaei, the Paraetacae, the Chalonitis near Mount Zagros, the plains around Ninus, and also Dolomene and Calachene and Chazene and Adiabene, and the tribes of Mesopotamia near the Gordyaeans, and the Mygdonians around Nisibis as far as Zeugma on the Euphrates, and much space on the far side of the Euphrates, which is occupied by Arabians, and those people who are now called

² The sections of Strabo pertaining to the Mesopotamian Borderland are: Strabo 16.1.21–28 (Mesopotamia itself); 16.2.3 (Commagene); 16.2.8 (Cyrrestice).



MAP 3.1 Strabo's Assyria

Syrians, in a particular sense, who extend as far as the Cilicians and the Phoenicians and the Judaeans and the sea that is opposite the Egyptian Sea and the Gulf of Issus.³

Strabo defines the space primarily according to its occupants. This allows for the fluidity and movement of the populations he describes and reveals a conception of geography that is historically, culturally and demographically

3 Strabo 16.1.1: Τῇ δὲ Περσίδι καὶ τῇ Σουσιανῇ συνάπτουσιν οἱ Ἀσσύριοι· καλοῦσι δ' οὕτω τὴν Βαβυλωνίαν καὶ πολλὴν τῆς κύκλῳ γῆς, ἥς ἐν μέρει καὶ ἡ Ἀτουρία ἐστίν, ἐν ᾗ περὶ ἡ Νίνος καὶ ἡ Ἀπολλωνιάτις καὶ Ἑλυμαῖοι καὶ Παραϊτάκαι καὶ ἡ περὶ τὸ Ζάγχρον ὄρος Χαλωνίτις καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν Νίνον πεδία, Δολομηνή τε καὶ Καλαχρηνή καὶ Χαζήνη καὶ Ἀδιαβηνή, καὶ τὰ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας ἔθνη τὰ περὶ Γορδυαίους καὶ τοὺς περὶ Νίσιβιν Μυγδόνας μέχρι τοῦ Ζεύγματος τοῦ κατὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην καὶ τῆς πέραν τοῦ Εὐφράτου πολλή ἦν Ἄραβες κατέχουσι, καὶ οἱ ἰδίως ὑπὸ τῶν νῦν λεγόμενοι Σύροι μέχρι Κιλικίων καὶ Φοινίκων καὶ Ἰουδαίων καὶ τῆς θαλάττης τῆς κατὰ τὸ Αἰγύπτιον πέλαγος καὶ τὸν Ἰσικόν κόλπον. Biffi (2002) 129–31.

contingent. This is particularly clear in his description of the boundaries of Syria, where Strabo explicitly notes that the named spaces he discusses have been defined differently in different times and places and by different authors.⁴

Strabo's opening description of οἱ Ἀσσύριοι is spatially defined and delimited by a list of contents: the major cities, regions and people of the region. These people and places can be geographically divided into six groups: Babylon and the surrounding area (Babylonia); Ninus (Nineveh) and the rest of Atouria/Athura proper; the people and lands between Babylon and Susa (Apolloniatis, the Elymaei, the Paraetacae, and Chalonitis near the Zagros Mountains); Adiabene and neighbouring regions (Dolomene, Calachene, Chazene); Mesopotamia (the tribes of Mesopotamia near the Gordyaeans, the Mygdonians around Nisibis as far as Zeugma, and the Arabians on the other side of the Euphrates) and Syria. Some of these locations are well known, others are not, but except for Babylonia, Mesopotamia and Syria, they all lie on the eastern side of the Tigris. In this opening passage, Mesopotamia is described according to the people who live there: the tribes of Mesopotamia near the Gordyaeans (τὰ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας ἔθνη τὰ περὶ Γορδυαίους) and the Mygdonians near Nisibis as far as Zeugma on the Euphrates (τοὺς περὶ Νίσιβιν Μυγδόνας μέχρι τοῦ Ζεύγματος τοῦ κατὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην). This approach contrasts with his later definition of the space according to geographical features but does not conflict with it.⁵ Here Strabo describes the people in the first instance (τὰ ἔθνη, τοὺς Μυγδόνας) but locates them in space with topographical markers (τῆς Μεσοποταμίας, περὶ Νίσιβιν... μέχρι τοῦ Ζεύγματος τοῦ κατὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην). For Strabo, the space of οἱ Ἀσσύριοι is centred on Babylonia (καλοῦσι δ' οὕτω τὴν Βαβυλωνίαν καὶ πολλὴν τῆς κύκλω γῆς), but his account is not specific regarding the boundaries of that sub-division, particularly in the north where it bordered Mesopotamia.⁶ In his description of the land of the Babylonians (ἡ χώρα τῶν Βαβυλωνίων), Strabo reports that the area is bordered on the west by the Skenitai Arabs whose land stretches as far as Adiabene and Gordyene (ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ἐσπέρας ὑπὸ τε Ἀράβων τῶν σκηνιτῶν μέχρι τῆς Ἀδιαβηνῆς καὶ τῆς Γορδυαίας).⁷

4 Strabo 16.2.2.

5 See Strabo 16.1.21.

6 His focus on the canal system implies that he considers that a defining feature of the region, Strabo 16.1.9–10.

7 Strabo 16.1.8: “περιέχεται δ' ἡ χώρα τῶν Βαβυλωνίων ἀπὸ μὲν τῆς ἡοῦς ὑπὸ τε Σουσίων καὶ Ἑλυμαίων καὶ Παραϊτακηνῶν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς μεσημβρίας ὑπὸ τοῦ Περσικοῦ κόλπου καὶ τῶν Χαλδαίων μέχρι Ἀράβων τῶν Μεσηνῶν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ἐσπέρας ὑπὸ τε Ἀράβων τῶν σκηνιτῶν μέχρι τῆς Ἀδιαβηνῆς καὶ τῆς Γορδυαίας, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἄρκτων ὑπὸ τε Ἀρμενίων καὶ Μήδων μέχρι τοῦ Ζάγρου καὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸ ἐθνῶν.” (The country of the Babylonians is surrounded on the east by the Susians, Elymaeans and Paraetaceni, on the south by the Persian Gulf and the Chaldaeans as far as the Mesene Arabians, on the west by the Skenitai Arabians as far as Adiabene and Gordyaea

This passage places the Armenians and Medes to the north of Babylonia and the Persian Gulf to the south, so Strabo's "western" border occupies a broad, nearly 180 degree, arc from the northwest to the southeast. Nevertheless, the specific note that the Skenitai extend as far as Gordyene makes clear that Strabo includes the Skenitai of southern Mesopotamia in this segment. Those Skenitai thus form the southern border of Strabo's Mesopotamia and the Tigris defines the eastern side.

The Greek name οἱ Ἀσσύριοι ultimately derives from the Akkadian "Aššur", the eponymous chief god of the Assyrians. Part of this area Strabo calls Ἀσσυρία. Although Strabo does not make the connection, this is a Greek transliteration of *Athura*, the Aramaic word for the heartland of the former Assyrian Empire.⁸ Strictly, the Assyrian heartland comprised land adjacent to the Tigris near the Taurus, but after the Neo-Babylonian and Median conquest of Assyria in the 610s BCE, the remains of the Assyrian state apparatus which governed from Harran in north-western Mesopotamia (Roman Carrhae, now in south-east Turkey) seems to have transferred the name *Athura* to the entire area of northern Mesopotamia.⁹ Strabo's use of the term to refer to such a wide area was not peculiar to him. In the first century BCE, Meleagros of Gadara referred to his home town in the Decapolis (in modern Jordan) as "an Attic town among Assyrians" (Ἀττικὴ ἐν Ἀσσυρίοις).¹⁰ The name Assyria had a powerful hold in the Greco-Roman historical imagination, but seldom a very precise geographical definition.¹¹

There are some correspondences between Strabo's division of Near Eastern space and Persian administrative categories. Strabo's conception of the land of οἱ Ἀσσύριοι as a unitary region aligns with our understanding of Achaemenid Persian satrapies. Much of our information about the Achaemenids comes from inscriptions dedicated by the kings themselves and inscribed on cliffs and monumental buildings. Some of these recount the deeds of the kings (especially Darius I (r. 522–486)) in the first person and some include lists of the people and places they conquered and ruled.¹² In the Persian royal inscriptions,

[Gordyene], and on the north by the Armenians and Medes as far as the Zagros, and the tribes around it.)

8 Radt (2002) 8.249; Herzfeld (1968) 304–5.

9 Herzfeld (1968) 305. For a brief discussion of the relative spatial orientations of the Akkadians and Assyrians, see Herzfeld (1968) 57.

10 *Ant. Pal.* 7.417.2.

11 On Trajan's *Assyria provincia*, see Lightfoot (1990) 121–24. On the use of the legendary Assyrian queen Semiramis in Strabo and his predecessors, see Cameron (Forthcoming).

12 Especially DB, DNa, DPe, DSaa, XPh; Lecoq (1997) 130–52. References to Achaemenid royal inscriptions conventionally take the form of an alphanumeric code comprising a letter denoting the king who nominally wrote it, an abbreviation denoting the location at which

the territory of Strabo's οἱ Ἀσσύριοι (with the exception of Strabo's Syria) is covered by the satrapies of *Bâbiruṣ*, *Athurâ* and *Arabâya*: southern Mesopotamia as formerly ruled from Babylon, northern Mesopotamia as formerly controlled by Assyria, and the steppe regions of the middle Euphrates.¹³

Despite the satrapies appearing in a different order in every royal inscription that lists them, the order of *Bâbiruṣ*, *Athurâ* and *Arabâya* is almost always consistent.¹⁴ This grouping is the ninth of Herodotus' Achaemenid taxation and muster districts:

From the Babylonians and the rest of Assyria, 1000 talents of silver and 500 castrated boys; this is the ninth district.¹⁵

This area included the lowland areas of the Fertile Crescent. It was located west of Media (the 10th district) and Susa (the 8th), south of the Taurus (Armenia was part of the 13th district) and east of Syria (the 5th district).¹⁶ Although he does not directly refer to Mesopotamia, that region was probably included within the rest of Assyria (τῆς λοιπῆς Ἀσσυρίας) as it was for the administrative geography of earlier regional powers. Babylonian documents show that there was a Satrap of "Babylonia and Ebir-Nari" from the time of Cyrus.¹⁷ The term Ebir-Nari ("across the river", often rendered Trans-Euphrates) describes the region to the west of the Euphrates and was still in use when Darius commissioned his palace inscriptions at Susa. Ebir-Nari comprised Syria, Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and was Herodotus' fifth district.¹⁸ The satrapy of Babylonia and

it was found, and a letter to differentiate between multiple inscriptions by the same ruler at the site. Thus Darius' Behistun inscription is DB, while DPe is one of the inscriptions of Darius from the terrace at Persepolis.

13 DB col. 1, lines 14–15; DPe lines 10–11; DSe lines 25–26; DNa lines 26–27; DSaa; XPh lines 22 & 25; Briant (2002) 172–73; Herzfeld (1968) 292, 357–59; Lecoq (1997) 130.

14 The exception is XPh in which *Bâbiruṣ* and *Athurâ* appear on line 22 and *Arabâya* on line 25, separated by several provinces.

15 Hdt 3.92: "Ἀπὸ Βαβυλωνίως δὲ καὶ τῆς λοιπῆς Ἀσσυρίας χίλια οἱ προσήιε τάλαντα ἀργυρίου καὶ παῖδες ἑκτομῖαι πεντακόσιοι· νομὸς εἷνατος οὗτος."

16 Hdt 3.91 (5th–8th); 3.92 (9th–12th); 3.93 (13th–16th).

17 Stolper (1989); Heltzer (1992); Briant (2002) 49, 884–85. Stolper (1989) 289–90: "More than twenty texts dated between 535 and 525 give the title to a man with the Iranian name Gūbaru."

18 Hdt 3.91: "Ἀπὸ δὲ Ποσιδηίου πόλιος, τὴν Ἀμφίλοχος ὁ Ἀμφιάρεω οἴκισε ἐπ' οὐροισι τοῖσι Κιλικίων τε καὶ Συρίων, ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ ταύτης μέχρι Αἰγύπτου, πλὴν μοίρης τῆς Ἀραβίων (ταῦτα γὰρ ἦν ἀτελέα), πεντήκοντα καὶ τριηκόσια τάλαντα φόρος ἦν· ἔστι δὲ ἐν τῷ νομῷ τούτῳ Φοινίκη τε πάσα καὶ Συρία ἢ Παλαιστίνη καλεομένη καὶ Κύπρος· νομὸς πέμπτος οὗτος." (The fifth province was the country (except for the part belonging to the Arabians, which paid no tribute) between Posideion, a city founded on the Cilician and Syrian border by Amphilochochus son of

Ebir-Nari survived the administrative changes of Darius I (522–486 BCE).¹⁹ Between the reign of Xerxes (485–465 BCE) and the end of the Achaemenid Empire, Ebir-Nari was detached from Babylonia as a separate satrapy, although it may have remained subordinate for some time.²⁰ Briant thinks it likely that Arbelitis, the hinterland of Arbela to the east of the Tigris, was administered as part of *Athurâ* during the Achaemenid period.²¹ Herodotus' list is topographically vague, but the Ionian historian seems to have had some degree of access to reliable information (including material derived from the text of the Behistun inscription of Darius I); his characterisation of Babylonia, Mesopotamia and Syria seems quite accurate.²² As far as we can tell from Herodotus, the tradition of Greek knowledge of the inland Fertile Crescent seems to have been reliably derived from Achaemenid Persian administrative units. Before Alexander's conquest of that empire, the Greeks knew of Mesopotamia as an Achaemenid province.

The Achaemenid satrapal system was inherited by the conquering Macedonians. Accounts of Alexander's successors reveal something of the Macedonian satrapal system but little of the specific geographical boundaries of the places they describe. When Perdiccas assigned the satrapies following Alexander's death in 323, he divided Babylonia and Mesopotamia and retained the division of Syria from both.²³ When the Macedonian general Antipater

Amphiarus, and Egypt; this paid three hundred and fifty talents; in all this province was all Phoenice and the part of Syria called Palestine, and Cyprus). Loeb trans. Herodotus may have been mistaken in including Cyprus in this district. Herzfeld has the island as part of a satrapy with Cilicia, Herzfeld (1968) 309. Briant retains Herodotus' division for the period of Darius I, Briant (2002) 488–489 (Cyprus), 498–500 (Cilicia).

19 Briant (2002) 392–393, 484, 487–490, 951–952; Herzfeld (1968) 60–61, 305.

20 The exact date of the division is unknown. "It was probably accomplished before 420, when cuneiform texts give the provincial governor of Babylonia, Gûbaru, the title "governor of the land of Akkad," with no mention of Syria", Stolper (1989) 297–98; Briant (2002) 578; earlier subordinate status, 487, 601. The missions of Erza and Nehemiah from Babylon to Judah attest to aspects of the fifth century administrative apparatus of Ebir-Nari, Briant (2002) 583–85.

21 Briant (2002) 719. See Map 3.1.

22 Briant (2002) 390–94, discusses the difficulties with Herodotus' list.

23 Diodorus lists the satrapies in the following order (18.3.1–3): Egypt; Syria; Cilicia; Media (Greater); Paphlagonia and Cappadocia (and bordering lands); Pamphylia, Lycia and Greater Phrygia; Caria; Lydia; Hellespontine Phrygia; Thrace and neighbouring tribes; Macedonia and neighbouring peoples; the kingdoms of Taxiles and Porus in India; the satrapy next to Taxiles'; the Hindu Kush (that of the Paropanisidae); Arachosia and Cedrosia; Aria and Drangine; Bactria and Sogdia; Parthia and Hyrcania; Persia; Carmania; Media (Lesser or Atropatene); Babylonia; Mesopotamia. Dexippus (*FGrH*, 100.8) gives much the same list, with the interesting note that he defines Babylonian and Mesopotamia thus: "Βαβυλωνίων δὲ καὶ τῆς μέσης τῶν ποταμῶν Τίγρητος καὶ Εὐφράτου τῶν μὲν Σέλευκος, τῆς

reassigned the satrapies in 320, Mesopotamia and Arbelitis were assigned to the same man and remained separate from Babylonia.²⁴ The apparatus of Seleucid government in Babylonia and Mesopotamia during the third and second centuries BCE showed significant continuity with Persian administration, but the general trend of increasing administrative division continued.²⁵ Under the Seleucids, the region covered by Strabo's οἱ Ἀσσύριοι was divided between the satrapies of Mesopotamia, Babylonia, the divisions of Syria, the districts of the Persian Gulf (Mesene and Characene), Apolloniatis, and Parapotamia.²⁶ These changes seem to comprise the redrawing of divisions internal to the *Bâbiruṣ-Athurâ-Arabâya* satrapal grouping, but our knowledge of their boundaries is mostly implicit from their names. Early Roman imperial authors like Strabo and Pliny used their Hellenistic sources extensively, but while their testimony is often used to discuss these Macedonian satrapies, their later date and evident reworking of material makes that method problematic. Nevertheless, from the satrapal names reported in the sources, it appears that considering the plains south of the Taurus and east of the Euphrates as a broad region was administratively convenient. The mountains to the north and east (the Taurus and Zagros respectively) presented sufficiently different concerns that the conceptual separation between highlands and lowlands was maintained from at least the time of Achaemenid satrapal organisation down to Strabo's description of the region in the Roman period.

Strabo's overall conception of οἱ Ἀσσύριοι is noteworthy in several respects. First, while the divisions of the *Geography* align with Persian and Seleucid administrative conceptions on a broad scale, Strabo does not seem to take the Achaemenid or Seleucid administrative structure as the basis for his sub-divisions or his narrative. The caveat here is that we are poorly informed about Seleucid administrative geography, which may have resembled Strabo's structure to a greater degree than the extant evidence suggests. Rather, Strabo divided the space of οἱ Ἀσσύριοι on the basis of geography and ethnography, as is clear from the terms he uses in the opening section and in those he uses

δὲ Μεσοποταμίας Ἀρχέλαος ἦρχε." Arrian (*FGrH*, 156.1.5–8) only mentions Syria. Quintus Curtius (10.10.1–6) gives the same list, but refers to the satrapies east and south of Media in general terms and omits mention of Mesopotamia or Babylonia.

24 On this occasion, Diodorus lists the satrapies as follows (18.39.5–6): Egypt; Syria; Cilicia; Mesopotamia and Arbelitis; Babylonia; Susiana; Persia; Carmania; Media; Parthia; Aria and Drangene; Bactria and Sogdia; Paropanisadae; the part of India bordering Paropanisadae; the kingdoms of Taxilis and Porus; Cappadocia; Greater Phrygia and Lycia; Caria; Lydia; Hellespontine Phrygia.

25 Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 42–43, 46.

26 Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 44; Edwell (2008) 68–69; Capdetrey (2007). For Syria, see Poseidonius' description of Seleucid administrative divisions, Strabo 16.2.4.

in what follows. Second, on the basis of the narrative space allocated to discussion of Babylonia alone (16.1.5–16), Strabo or his sources consider that area to be the most important part of the land of the Assyrians.²⁷ Strabo also devotes considerable attention to Susiana and the tribes of the southern Zagros Mountains (16.1.17–18). By contrast, he gives little attention to Adiabene (the plains between the Tigris north of Babylon and the Zagros). He lists several places in those plains, but he returns to few of them in detail. In fact, of the two sections discussing Adiabene, only the first (16.1.4) contains any significant degree of geographical detail; the second (16.1.19) is almost entirely devoted to the lengthy rivalry between the Medes, Armenians, and Babylonians and the recent intrusion of the Parthians into that realm.

Strabo's description of Mesopotamia is thus placed within a broader context of space based on the human population of "Assyria". That area is divided among peoples defined according to ethnic designations. These ethnic groups seem to align with our knowledge of the administrative geography of earlier multi-cultural political entities, but Strabo does not make explicit the degree to which his ethno-geographical conception of the area is based on those earlier administrative groups. When Strabo zooms in to examine the spaces within "the land of the Assyrians", his approach changes.

1.1 *Mesopotamia*

The basis for Strabo's delimitation of Mesopotamia is more strictly geographical. He describes the bounds of the area using geophysical features, three of which (to the east, west and south) are relatively easily located rivers. The northern boundary of Strabo's space is more difficult to place. While mountains are an attractive "natural" conceptual boundary, they are difficult to define in practice.

Whereas in his initial survey of οἱ Ἀσσύριοι Strabo describes the area by reference to the people there (such as τὰ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας ἔθνη), when he describes Mesopotamia in more detail at the end of 16.1, he defines the region according to its boundaries, shape and dimensions:²⁸

Mesopotamia receives its name from an accidental characteristic. As I have said, it lies between the Euphrates and the Tigris; and the Tigris

27 See also the way he describes οἱ Ἀσσύριοι in the first instance (16.1.1): "καλοῦσι δ' οὕτω τὴν Βαβυλωνίαν καὶ πολλὴν τῆς κύκλῳ γῆς" (They call Babylonia and much of the country all round by this name [οἱ Ἀσσύριοι]). The land of the Assyrians is described as "Babylonia" and "the surrounding lands".

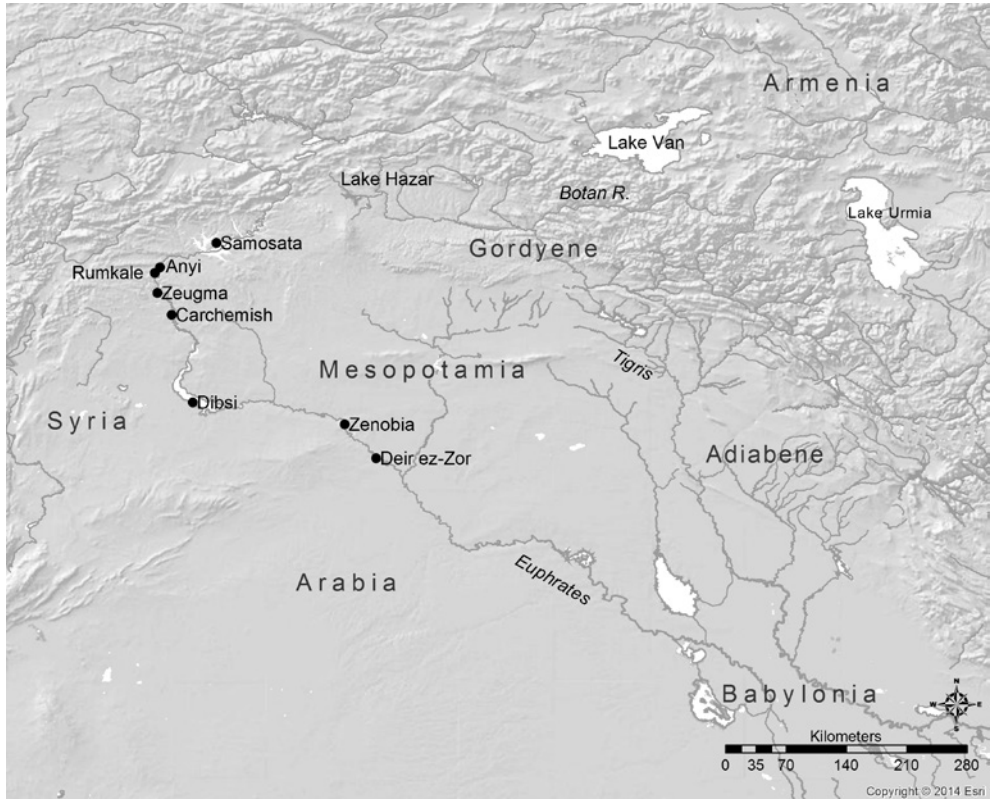
28 Cardinal directions: Strabo 16.1.21. Size and shape: Strabo 16.1.22.

washes its eastern side only, whereas the Euphrates washes its western and southern sides; and on the north is the Taurus, which separates Armenia from Mesopotamia. Now the greatest distance by which the two rivers are separated is that towards the mountains; and this distance might be the same as that stated by Eratosthenes – I mean that from Thapsacus, where was the old bridge of the Euphrates, to the crossing of the Tigris, where Alexander crossed it – 2400 stadia; but the shortest distance between the two rivers is somewhere in the neighbourhood of Seleucia and Babylon, slightly more than 200 stadia. The Tigris flows through the middle of Lake Thopitis, as it is called, in the direction of its breadth; and, after traversing it to the opposite shore, it sinks underground with upward blasts and a loud noise; and having flowed for a considerable distance invisible, it rises again not far away from Gordyaea; and it traverses the lake so forcefully, as Eratosthenes says, that, although the lake elsewhere is briny and without fish, yet in this part it is fresh, runs like a river, and is full of fish.²⁹

This construction by which Strabo relates the name of Mesopotamia to its geography, ἀπὸ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος (“from an accidental characteristic”), is common in the *Geography* and signals Strabo’s participation in the tradition of Hellenistic scholarship.³⁰ An “accidental characteristic” is a characteristic of the so-named thing that is not essential to its nature. In this philosophical sense, the presence of the two rivers does not fundamentally change the space (one could imagine the Syrian steppe without the two rivers), but it is a

29 Strabo 16.1.21: Μεσοποταμία δ' ἀπὸ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος ὠνόμασαι· εἴρηται δ' ὅτι κεῖται τοῦ Εὐφράτου μεταξὺ καὶ τοῦ Τίγριος καὶ διότι ὁ μὲν Τίγρις τὸ ἐωθινὸν αὐτῆς μόνον κλύζει πλευρόν, τὸ δ' ἑσπέριον καὶ νότιον ὁ Εὐφράτης· πρὸς ἄρκτον δὲ ὁ Ταῦρος ὁ τοὺς Ἀρμενίουσιν διορίζων ἀπὸ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας. τὸ μὲν οὖν μέγιστον ὃ ἀφίστανται διάστημα ἀπ' ἀλλήλων τὸ πρὸς τοῖς ὄρεσιν ἐστί· τοῦτο δ' ἂν εἴη τὸ αὐτὸ ὅπερ εἴρηκεν Ἐρατοσθένης, τὸ ἀπὸ Θαψάκου, καθ' ὃ ἦν τὸ ζεύγμα τοῦ Εὐφράτου τὸ παλαιόν, ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ Τίγριος διάβασιν, καθ' ἣν διέβη Ἀλέξανδρος αὐτόν, δισχιλίῳ τετρακοσίῳ· τὸ δ' ἐλάχιστον μικρῷ πλέον τῶν διακοσίων κατὰ Σελεύκειάν που καὶ Βαβυλῶνα· διαρρεῖ δ' ὁ Τίγρις τὴν Θωπίτιν καλουμένην λίμνην κατὰ πλάτος μέσσην· περαιωθεὶς δ' ἐπὶ θάτερον χεῖλος κατὰ γῆς δύεται μετὰ πολλοῦ ψόφου καὶ ἀναφυσημάτων, ἐπὶ πολὺ δ' ἐνεχθεὶς ἀφανὴς ἀνίσχει· πάλιν οὐ πολὺ ἄπωθεν τῆς Γορδυαίας· οὕτω δὲ σφοδρῶς διεκβάλλει τὴν λίμνην, ὥς φησιν Ἐρατοσθένης, ὥστε ἄλμυράν αὐτὴν οὖσαν καὶ ἀνιχθὺν γλυκεῖαν κατὰ τοῦτ' εἶναι τὸ μέρος καὶ ῥοώδη καὶ ἰχθύων πλήρη. Biffi (2002) 163.

30 It appears 18 times: Strabo 4.1.7; 5.3.6 (ἐξῆς δ' ἐν ἑκατὸν σταδίοις τῷ Κιρκαίῳ Ταρρακίνα ἐστί, Τραχίνην καλουμένην πρότερον ἀπὸ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος.); 6.1.12; 7a.1.30, 44; 8.3.2, 3, 24; 9.2.17, 25; 9.3.13 (Ἐξῆς γὰρ ἐν τῇ παραλίᾳ μετὰ τὴν Ἀντικύραν πολίχριν ἐστὶν Ὀπισθομάραθος· εἴτ' ἄκρα Φαρύγιον ἔχουσα ὕφορμον· εἴθ' ὁ λίμνη ὕστατος ὁ προσαγορευθεὶς μυχὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος, ὑπὸ τῷ Ἑλικῶνι καὶ τῇ Ἀσκηρὶ κείμενος.); 9.4.5; 9.5.18; 16.1.21; 16.2.15; 16.4.6, 7, 24. Strabo's participation in the Greek intellectual tradition is discussed in Chapter 2.



MAP 3.2 The geographical boundaries of Strabo's Mesopotamia

non-separable or permanent “accident” from which the space gets its name.³¹ Accordingly, the Tigris and Euphrates delimit Strabo's Mesopotamia to the east and west, and their crossings provide points by which Strabo defines its widest extent.³² Both rivers arise in Armenia, leading Strabo to describe their courses

31 Porphry, *Eisagoge* 5 (Barnes (2003) 220–35 discusses the passage in relation to Aristotle's thought); Dionysius Thrax (*Techne grammatike* 12) calls this a “pheronym”: “φερώνυμον δέ ἐστι τὸ ἀπὸ τίνος συμβεβηκός τεθέν, ὡς Τισαμενός καὶ Μεγαπένθης” (A pheronymous noun is derived from some event, such as *Tisamenos* (having avenged), *Megapenthēs* (greatly sorrowing), Kemp (1986)).

32 Strabo uses Zeugma as a reference point for long distance measurements: “ἀπὸ θαλάττης δ' ἐπὶ τὸ ζεύγμα τοῦ Εὐφράτου στάδιοι εἰσιν... οὐκ ἐλάττους τῶν [χιλίων καὶ] τετρακοσίων”. An interpolation reiterating and specifying the two ends of this distance measurement has been rejected by most editors since Kramer (1844) (Meineke (1866); Radt (2002)). Jones (1917) notes the opinion of Kramer and Meineke but includes after στάδιοι εἰσιν the line “ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰσσηκοῦ κόλπου μέχρι τοῦ ζεύγματος τοῦ κατὰ Κομμαγενήν” (from the Gulf of Issus to the bridge at Commagene). On the distance, see Radt (2002) 8.285.

(especially the Euphrates) in his book on that region.³³ Those descriptions remain consistent in their definition of Mesopotamia in terms of the two rivers. However, the extent to which Strabo correctly understood the source of the Tigris is unclear.

Strabo discusses the source of the Tigris on three occasions.³⁴ In book 16 he reports that the source is near Gordyene (οὐ πολὺ ἄπωθεν τῆς Γορδυαίας) and in book 11 that it emerges near Chalonitis (κατὰ τὴν Χαλωνίτιν).³⁵ As the only place named Chalonitis known to us is south of Adiabene, near Babylonia, this latter topological reference must be either an error or an unknown Chalonitis which does not help us locate the source of the river.³⁶ Until recently, the Tigris passed under the Taurus from Lake Hazar and into Mesopotamia near where the reservoir of the Kralkızı Dam now lies, around 50km north of the modern Turkish city of Diyarbakır (ancient Amida).³⁷ The third mention of the sources of the Tigris does not mention underground passages or Chalonitis. In book 11, Strabo locates the sources of the Tigris (τοῦ Τίγριος πηγαί) in the Niphates (Νιφάτης) Mountains, which he locates between the Taurus proper and the Zagros.³⁸ Strabo elsewhere places Mount Niphates “above Mount Masius”

33 The course of the two rivers is described previously on two occasions, at 11.12.3 (in his description of the Taurus) and 11.14.2 (in his description of Armenia). In both, the Euphrates is described in much more detail: at 11.12.3, Strabo emphasises the primacy of the Euphrates in terms of its size and length and the Tigris is barely mentioned at 11.14.2. In both places he emphasises the winding course of the Euphrates and that the two rivers form Mesopotamia by enclosure: “ὁ δὲ Τίγρις... συνάπτει τῷ Εὐφράτῃ πλησίον καὶ ποιεῖ τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν πρὸς αὐτόν” (11.12.3, “The Tigris ... comes close to the Euphrates and with it forms Mesopotamia”); “Ὁ γὰρ Εὐφράτης... ποιεῖ τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν πρὸς τὸν Τίγριν” (11.14.2, “For the Euphrates ... forms Mesopotamia with the Tigris”).

34 For the rivers and lake discussed in this section, see Map 3.2.

35 Emergence near Chalonitis: Strabo 11.14.8. Gordyene: Strabo 16.1.21.

36 On Chalonitis (the region around the town called Chala/Hulwān): Isidore 2, Polyb. 5.54.6–7, Pliny *NH* 6.131, Tac. *Ann.* 6.41 (who calls the town Hala).

37 For the geomorphology of the upper Tigris catchment area, see Nicoll (2010) 411–12. The extensive water manipulation of the Tigris and Euphrates under the auspices of the GAP (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi) Southeast Anatolian regional development project has altered many aspects of the landscape of northern Mesopotamia, most notably the submergence of ancient sites along the rivers (Zeugma and Samosata in particular), but also in the lowering of the water level of Lake Hazar below the former level of the natural underground outflow into the Tigris. The lake now drains into the Tigris through artificial tunnels.

38 Strabo 11.12.4: “τὰ μὲν δὴ πρόσβορρα ὄρη οὕτω καλοῦσι, τὰ δὲ νότια τὰ πέραν τοῦ Εὐφράτου τῆς Καππαδοκίας καὶ τῆς Κομμαγενῆς πρὸς ἔω τείνοντα κατ’ ἀρχὰς μὲν αὐτὸ τοῦτο καλεῖται Ταῦρος, διορίζων τὴν Σωφηνὴν καὶ τὴν ἄλλην Ἀρμενίαν ἀπὸ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας· τινὲς δὲ Γορδυαία ὄρη καλοῦσιν. ἐν δὲ τούτοις ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ Μάσιον, τὸ ὑπερκείμενον τῆς Νισίβιος ὁρος καὶ τῶν Τίγρην καὶ Εὐφράτην. ἔπειτα ἐξάιρεται πλέον καὶ καλεῖται Νιφάτης· ἐνταῦθα δὲ καὶ τοῦ Τίγριος

(which in turn is above Nisibis) “far towards the east, opposite Gordyene”,³⁹ while a third reference places Niphates to the north of Media.⁴⁰ These mountains should thus fall somewhere around a line between Lake Van and Lake Urmia.⁴¹ It is likely that when Strabo refers to the source of the Tigris, he is referring to one of that river’s major tributaries, such as the Botan River which arises near Lake Van and runs east into the Tigris.⁴² Classical authors knew the Botan as the Kentrites, a substantial river which “divided Armenia and the country of the Carduchi”.⁴³ Strabo’s understanding of the source of the Tigris is important for determining his conception of “the Taurus”, especially with respect to the borders of Mesopotamia.

To the north of Mesopotamia is Armenia and the Taurus Mountains and to the east is the Tigris. As is often the case, things become unclear where the river meets the mountains.⁴⁴ In particular, the location of the Mesopotamian sub-region which Strabo calls Gordyene has produced scholarly consternation. In his description of Armenia, Strabo says that the Gordyene Mountains

πηγαὶ κατὰ τὸ νότιον τῆς ὀρεινῆς πλευρὸν· εἴτ’ ἀπὸ τοῦ Νιφάτου μάλλον ἔτι καὶ μάλλον ἢ ῥάχης ἐκτεινομένη τὸ Ζάγριον ὄρος ποιεῖ τὸ διορίζον τὴν Μηδίαν καὶ τὴν Βαβυλωνίαν.” (The mountains on the north, then, bear these names, whereas those on the south, on the far side of the Euphrates, in their extent towards the east from Cappadocia and Commagene, are, at their beginning called Taurus proper, which separates Sophene and the rest of Armenia from Mesopotamia; by some these are called the Gordyean Mountains, and among these belongs also Masius, the mountain which is situated above Nisibis and Tigranocerta. Then the Taurus rises higher and bears the name Niphates; and somewhere here are the sources of the Tigris, on the southern side of the mountainous country. Then from the Niphates the mountain-chain extends still farther and farther and forms the mountain Zagrus which separates Media and Babylonia.) Horace uses the Niphates as an indicator of the Parthian lands over which Augustus celebrated a triumph in BCE (*Carmina* 2.9.20).

39 Strabo 11.14.2: “τοῦ δὲ Μασίου ὑπέρκειται πρὸς ἔω πολὺ κατὰ τὴν Γορδυηνὴν ὁ Νιφάτης”.

40 Strabo 11.13.3.

41 Both Pliny (*NH* 5.98) and Pomponius Mela (1.81) give imprecise locations for Niphates amidst lists of mountain ranges comprising the Taurus. Radt (2002) 7.306 identifies Niphates with the modern Tendürik Dağı northeast of Lake Van.

42 Tozer identified the “Lake Thopitis” described by Strabo in 11.14.8 as Lake Van, (1881) 293; Tozer (1897) 268; Dillemann (1962) 41–42.

43 Xen. *Anab.* 4.3.1: Ταύτην δ’ αὖ τὴν ἡμέραν ἠϋλίσθησαν ἐν ταῖς κώμαις ταῖς ὑπὲρ τοῦ πεδίου παρὰ τὸν Κεντρίτην ποταμόν, εὖρος ὡς διπλεθρον, ὃς ὀρίζει τὴν Ἀρμενίαν καὶ τὴν τῶν Καρδούχων χώραν. καὶ οἱ Ἕλληνες ἐνταῦθα ἀνέπνευσαν ἄσμενοι ἰδόντες πεδιονᾶπείχε δὲ τῶν ὀρέων ὁ ποταμὸς ἕξ ἢ ἑπτὰ στάδια τῶν Καρδούχων. (For that day again they found quarters in the villages that lie above the plain bordering the Kentrites river, which is about two plethra in width and separates Armenia from the country of the Carduchians. There the Greeks took breath, glad to behold a plain; for the river was distant six or seven stadia from the mountains of the Carduchians). Loeb trans. The same story is related by Diodorus Siculus 14.27.7.

44 On the difficulty of assigning precise borders in mountainous areas, see Sahllins (1989).

contain Mount Masius, which is above Nisibis and Tigranocerta.⁴⁵ Strabo repeatedly locates these important Mesopotamian cities in Mesopotamia and relative to Mount Masius. In his description of Mesopotamia, Strabo describes Nisibis as located “under” Mount Masius (ὑπὸ τῷ Μάσιῳ ὄρει κειμένην). Mount Masius is usually identified with the low foothills north of Nisibis, separating the plains of Mesopotamia from the upper Tigris River valley called the Tur Abdin, and the Karakaş Dağı to the west of those hills.⁴⁶ However, while Nisibis is well-known, the locations of both Tigranocerta and Masius have been disputed.⁴⁷ Syme objects to this characterisation of Masius as part of the Gordyaeen Mountains: “the Gordyaeen massif is ... the easterly continuation of the Taurus ... divided from Mesopotamia by the River Tigris ... Yet Strabo here puts the Gordyaeen Mountains west of the Tigris.”⁴⁸ For Syme, the Tigris is a geological and onomastic barrier: the Gordyaeen Mountains must end at the Tigris. Any continuation of the mountains on the other side of the river must have another name and be a geographically distinct entity. This is unnecessarily rigid. The course of the upper Tigris is a ravine not unlike the course of the upper Euphrates between Commagene and Cappadocia. Ancient writers had no problem describing that latter river forcing its way through the Taurus without forcing a conceptual division between the Taurus to the east of the Euphrates and the Taurus to the west.⁴⁹

Strabo places the territory of the Gordyaeans (τὰ τῶν Γορδυαίων χωρία) next to the Tigris (πρὸς δὲ τῷ Τίγρει) and within Mesopotamia. This implies that these people live on the right bank of the river, as Strabo makes explicit in his book on Armenia:

From there [the Tigris] flows down towards Opis and the so-called wall of Semiramis, passing by the Gordyaeans on the right and all of

45 Strabo 11.12.4: “τινὲς δὲ Γορδυαῖα ὄρη καλοῦσιν. ἐν δὲ τούτοις ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ Μάσιον, τὸ ὑπερκείμενον τῆς Νισίβιος ὄρος καὶ τῶν Τίγρανοκέρτων.” (Some call these the Gordyaeen Mountains among which is Masius, the mountain which lies above Nisibis and Tigranocerta.)

46 Radt (2002) 7.306; Dillemann (1962) 32–34; Syme (1995) 47. Syme calls them “a series of undulations rather than a mountain chain”. Weissbach “Masion” *RE* Halb. 28, cols. 2068–69.

47 Strabo 11.12.4: “τινὲς δὲ Γορδυαῖα ὄρη καλοῦσιν. ἐν δὲ τούτοις ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ Μάσιον, τὸ ὑπερκείμενον τῆς Νισίβιος ὄρος καὶ τῶν Τίγρανοκέρτων.” (Some call these the Gordyaeen Mountains among which is Masius, the mountain which lies above Nisibis and Tigranocerta.) The best suggestion for the location of Tigranocerta is a set of unexcavated ruins near Arzan on the east bank of the Garzan Su, Sinclair (1994); Sinclair (1996).

48 Syme (1995) 48.

49 Pliny (*NH* 5.85) gives a striking image.

Mesopotamia. The Euphrates, on the contrary, has the same country on the left. Approaching each other, they form Mesopotamia ...⁵⁰

Strabo is clear: the Gordyaeans and Mesopotamia are on the right (west) bank of the Tigris and lie in the land between that river and the Euphrates.⁵¹ The only problem is that the country of the Gordyaeans is well-known to include parts of the Taurus Mountains to the east (i.e. on the left bank) of the Tigris. Strabo is explicit that the Gordyaeans are the same people as the Carduchians (οὓς οἱ πάλαι Καρδούχους ἔλεγον, “whom those in earlier times called the Carduchians”).⁵² The Carduchians are most famous now, as they probably were also in Strabo’s time, for their appearance in Xenophon’s *Anabasis* as warlike mountaineers, where they occupy a stretch of the Taurus east of the Tigris and north of the Assyrian heartland whose ruins Xenophon describes.⁵³ Ptolemy places Gordyene east of the source of the Tigris, and Tigranocerta within Gordyene.⁵⁴ Pliny also places the Gordyaeans east of the Tigris.⁵⁵ Since Xenophon, Pliny and Ptolemy all place the Gordyaeans/Carduchians on the east bank of the Tigris, it seems highly likely that Strabo conceived of them as inhabiting the same space, and thus dwelling on both banks of the Tigris. Just as the name Masius could be applied to a continuous range on both sides of the Tigris, so in Strabo’s understanding of the region, Gordyene extends on both sides of the Tigris, and lies within Mesopotamia.

50 Strabo 11.14.8: ἐκεῖθεν δ’ ἤδη πρὸς τὴν Ὠπιν καὶ τὸ τῆς Σεμιράμιδος καλούμενον διατεῖχισμα ἐκεῖνός τε καταφέρεται τοὺς Γορδυαίους ἐν δεξιᾷ ἀφείς καὶ τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν ὅλην, καὶ ὁ Εὐφράτης τοῦναντίον ἐν ἀριστερᾷ ἔχων τὴν αὐτὴν χώραν: πλησιάσαντες δὲ ἀλλήλοις καὶ ποιήσαντες τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν...

51 See also the description of Tigranes’ conquests at Strabo 11.14.15: “αὐξηθεὶς... ὑπάρχους δ’ ἔσχε καὶ τὸν Ἀτροπατηνὸν καὶ τὸν Γορδυαῖον, μεθ’ ὧν καὶ τὴν λοιπὴν Μεσοποταμίαν, ἔτι δὲ τὴν Συρίαν αὐτὴν καὶ Φοινίκην διαβάς τὸν Εὐφράτην ἀνὰ κράτος εἶλεν.” (But when he had grown in power ... he subjugated to himself the rulers of Atropene and Gordyaea, and along with these the rest of Mesopotamia, and also crossed the Euphrates and by main strength took Syria itself and Phoenicia.).

52 Pliny *NH* 6.44; Radt (2002) 8.280.

53 Xen. *Anab.* 3.5–4.3; Diodorus 14.27.4; Syme (1995) 53. Xenophon places the border between Armenia and the Carduchians at the Kentrites River (*Anab.* 4.3.1). On Assyrian ruins: Xen. *Anab.* 3.4.

54 Ptolemy’s Gordyene is a sub-region of Armenia (Ptol. *Geog.* 5.13.20), but the line which describes the section of coordinates, including Tigranocerta, as being within Gordyene (Ptol. *Geog.* 5.13.22: “[καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτὴν ἢ Γορδυνη[σία] ἢ Γορδυνηή..... οὐ δ’ ἴθι γ’]”) only occurs in two manuscripts, Stükelberger and Grasshoff (2006) 2.554.

55 Pliny (*NH* 6.44) reports that the Adiabeni shared a common border with the Gordyeni: “Adiabenis conectuntur Carduchi quondam dicti, nunc Cordueni, praefluente Tigri ...” (The Carduchi, as they were once called, are connected to the Adiabeni. Now they are called the Cordueni [Gordyeni]. The Tigris flows past them.).

Strabo's inclusion of Tigranocerta and Gordyene within "Mesopotamia" shows that, in his understanding, Mesopotamia extended past the Tur Abdin to include the Upper Tigris Basin and even extended a short distance into the Taurus Mountains. When he notes that the northern boundary is the Taurus, Strabo is careful to mention that the adjacent region is Armenia.⁵⁶ Strabo most likely considered the northern-facing slopes and watersheds of the Taurus part of Armenia and the southern-facing slopes and watersheds part of Mesopotamia.

2 Pliny

Pliny uses "Mesopotamia" in two ways: as a geographical denomination of the land between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers and as an administrative denomination for an area within that larger space. Pliny's geographical descriptions of Mesopotamia ("Mesopotamia inter Euphraten et Tigrin" and "Mesopotamiae inter duos amnes sitae")⁵⁷ both delimit the space according to the two rivers and serve as an etymological gloss on "Meso-potamia" (the land between the rivers).⁵⁸ The name of the space depends on the features which define its eastern and western boundaries, while Pliny's conception of the northern and southern limits is left implicit. These implicit limits can be discerned by comparison with other geographical areas in Pliny's narrative. This relatively simple delimitation of "Mesopotamia" is complicated by two factors. The first is Pliny's division of his description of Mesopotamia as a geographical region into two well-separated sections: in book 5 as part of his description of Syria and in book 6 with his account of the rest of Asia.⁵⁹ The second factor complicating Pliny's understanding of "Mesopotamia" is the presence of another

56 Strabo 16.1.21: "πρὸς ἄρκτον δὲ ὁ Ταῦρος ὁ τοὺς Ἀρμενίους διορίζων ἀπὸ τῆς Μεσσοποταμίας." Strabo also refers to the Taurus as the boundary between Armenia and Mesopotamia in his description of Armenia (11.12.2).

57 Pliny, *NH* 5.66; 6.25. The context of "inter duos amnes sitae" (6.25) makes it clear that the *duos amnes* are the Euphrates and the Tigris.

58 Pliny's stated definition of Mesopotamia is the same as Strabo's: "eadem Mesopotamia inter Euphraten et Tigrin" (16.1.21). This was also the method of Arrian and perhaps Nearchos, *BNJ* 133 F 1 XVI = *Arr. Indica* 42.3: "ὅς ῥέων ἐξ Ἀρμενίης παρὰ πόλιν Νίνον, πάλαι ποτὲ μεγάλην καὶ εὐδαίμονα, τὴν μέσσην ἑωυτοῦ τε καὶ τοῦ Εὐφράτου ποταμοῦ <χώρ>ην Μεσσοποταμίην ἐπὶ τῷδε κληρίζεσθαι ποιεῖ." (This river flows from Armenia, past the city of Ninus, which of old was once great and prosperous, and causes the land between itself and the river Euphrates to be called Mesopotamia for that reason.) Trans. Whitby, 'Nearchos (133)', *BNJ*.

59 The ideological implications of this narrative division are explored in Chapter 7.

space with the same name, this time a “*praefectura*” which occupies only a part of the geographical space delimited by the two rivers.

2.1 *Between Two Books*

Pliny’s geographical narrative occupies books 3–6 of his *Natural History*. In books 3–5, his general procedure is to describe Roman space according to the Roman categories of organisation, that is, province by province. In book 6, Pliny describes the regions of Asia, beyond Roman control. Although some of his sources for this area were probably sufficiently informed about political structures in the east to attempt a description of that space according to non-Roman systems of organisation, Pliny changes his approach to use the features of physical geography as his narrative reference points.

His description of Syria in book 5 provides an example. After describing Egypt up to Pelusium, he pauses to describe Syria in general terms (see Map 3.3):

Next along the coast is Syria, at one time the greatest of lands and divided with many different names. For it was called Palestine where it touches the Arabians, and Judaea and Coele, then Phoenicia, and further inland Damascena, and then even further, southern Babylonia. It is called Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, Sophene across the Taurus. Then, Commagene on this side of Sophene; Adiabene, previously called Assyria, on the other side of Armenia and Antiochia where it touches Cilicia. [67] It is 470 m.p in length between Cilicia and Arabia, and 175 m.p. wide from Seleucia Pieria and to Zeugma, a town on the Euphrates. Those who divide it into smaller parts want Phoenicia to be surrounded by Syria and the coast to be maritime Syria, of which Idumaea and Judaea are a part, then Phoenicia, then Syria. The whole sea which lies offshore they call the Phoenician Sea. The Phoenician people have great fame from the discovery of letters and the constellations and the military and naval arts.⁶⁰

60 Pliny, *NH*, 5.66–67: Iuxta Syria litus occupat, quondam terrarum maxuma et plurimis distincta nominibus. namque Palaestine vocabatur qua contingit Arabas, et Iudaea et Coele, dein Phoenice et qua recedit intus Damascena, ac magis etiamnum meridiana Babylonia, eadem Mesopotamia inter Euphraten et Tigrin quaque transit Taurum Sophene, citra vero eam Commagene et ultra Armeniam Adiabene, Assyria ante dicta, et ubi Ciliciam attingit Antiochia. [67] longitudo eius inter Ciliciam et Arabiam CCCCLXX [m.]p. est, latitudo a Seleucia Pieria ad oppidum in Euphrate Zeugma CLXXV [m.p.]. qui subtilius dividunt, circumfundi Syria Phoenicen volunt et esse oram maritimam Syriae, cuius pars sit Idumaea et Iudaea, dein Phoenicen, dein Syriam. id quod praeiacet mare totum

This description shows the geographic ambiguity of the term “Syria” which for Pliny encompasses the entire Fertile Crescent including Mesopotamia, Babylonia and Adiabene.⁶¹ Pliny indicates the contemporary denomination of Syria by his use of present tense verbs to express topological relationships throughout the passage, including *occupat* to describe Syria broadly. However, most of the names that Pliny lists are governed by *vocabatur* in the imperfect. By using the incomplete past tense, Pliny indicates a continuing state in the past during which the areas he names had separate and individual denominations now superseded by their aggregation into Roman Syria. In this way, his text also defines the *space* of Syria in historical terms. Moreover, these other methods of dividing the space into smaller regions clearly illustrate that the space labelled “Syria” was available for construction and redefinition according to the desires and requirements of the author. In this passage, Pliny gives verbal and geometric definitions for Syria; in the narrative that follows, he seldom strays beyond those geometric dimensions: between Antioch and Zeugma (*a Seleucia Pieria ad oppidum in Euphrate Zeugma*) and Cilicia and Arabia (*inter Ciliciam et Arabiam*).⁶² These dimensions clearly do not correspond to Pliny’s own broader definition of “Syria” which includes all of Mesopotamia, Babylonia and Adiabene, rather they correspond more or less to the limits of the Roman province of Pliny’s time.

Pliny reaches beyond the Roman provincial organisation of Syria in two sections, both describing parts of the Mesopotamian Borderland in the Parthian sphere. These sections occur in a wide passage describing the Euphrates.⁶³ This passage is marked as a sort of digression with an initial sentence indicating the direction of the narrative: “It will be most appropriate to speak of the Euphrates here” (*et de Euphrate hoc in loco dixisse aptissimum fuerit*).⁶⁴ Pliny marks the end of the passage, which discusses the flooding of the Euphrates in Babylonia, by an explicit return to his circuit of Roman space: “But let us return to the coast of Syria” (*sed redeamus ad oram Syriae*).⁶⁵

Phoenicium appellatur. ipsa gens Phoenicum in magna gloria litterarum inventionis et siderum navaliumque ac bellicarum artium.

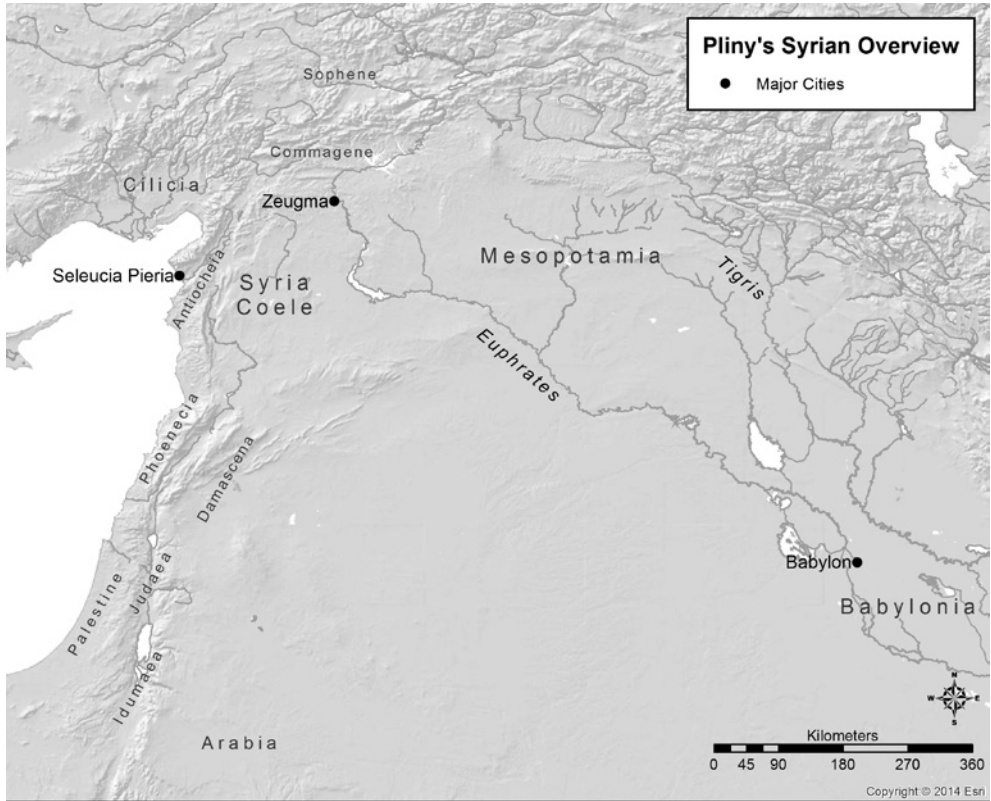
61 The broad application can also be seen in Strabo 16.1.1–2.

62 These dimensions are reasonably accurate. Depending on which start and end points one selects, the straight line distance between Cilicia and Arabia is 600–700 km; 470 m.p. is 696 km. The straight line distance between Seleucia Pieria (Antioch’s port, close to the mouth of the Orontes) and Zeugma is a little over 200km; 175 m.p. is 259 km.

63 Pliny *NH* 5.83–90.

64 Pliny *NH* 5.83.

65 Pliny *NH* 5.91.



MAP 3.3 Pliny's Syrian overview

The first of the two extra-Syrian sections describes three areas on the eastern side of the Euphrates, that is, between the Euphrates and the Tigris, and thus within the area previously defined by Pliny as “Mesopotamia”:

Arabia, above mentioned, has the towns of Edessa, formerly called Antiochia, Callirhoë, named from its fountain, and Carrhæ, famous for the defeat of Crassus. Adjoining to this is the praefecture of Mesopotamia, which derives its origin from the Assyrians and in which are the towns of Anthemusia and Nicephorium. Next are the Arabians, called Praetavi, whose capital is Singara.⁶⁶

66 Pliny *NH* 5.86: “Arabia supra dicta habet oppida Edessam, quae quondam Antiochia dicebatur, Callirhoem, a fonte nominatam, Carrhas, Crassi clade nobile. iungitur praefectura Mesopotamiae, ab Assyriis originem trahens, in qua Anthemusia et Nicephorium oppida. mox Arabes qui Praetavi vocantur; horum caput Singara.”

The specific geographical content of this section will be fully discussed in the next chapter, but as an adjunct to the narrative description of Roman Syria, it is noteworthy that these three areas, Arabia Osrhoene, praefectura Mesopotamia and the Praetavi Arabs, include some of the most important cities of Mesopotamia: Edessa, Carrhae, Anthemusia (Batnae), Nicephorium, Singara. By contrast, Pliny's description of Mesopotamia in book 6 omits Edessa, Carrhae, and Singara.⁶⁷ Two of the most important cities of northwestern Mesopotamia, Edessa and Carrhae, are associated with Roman Syria rather than with the area Pliny defines as Mesopotamia.

After returning to the Euphrates, Pliny's narrative continues down the river before digressing inland to Palmyra and the desert cities of southern Syria, then back to the Euphrates and downriver to Babylonia. The narrative of the Euphrates from Sura to southern Mesopotamia is the second extra-Syrian section.⁶⁸ Here Pliny implies the presence of a border between Roman and Parthian space by noting that Philiscum is a Parthian town on the Euphrates.⁶⁹ The narrative of the lower Euphrates continues into Parthian space and includes Babylon itself, which, along with the lower reaches of the Euphrates, is also described in book 6.⁷⁰ In that book, Pliny describes several cities in southern Mesopotamia, the area that Strabo called Babylonia, as being in "Mesopotamia".⁷¹ In a geographical sense, Pliny's understanding of "Mesopotamia" includes all of the land between the rivers, from the Taurus as far as the mouths of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.

2.2 *Praefectura Mesopotamiae*

One of the most difficult toponyms in Pliny's account of the borderland is the term "praefectura Mesopotamiae". As was just noted, that designation comes in book 5 in a list between Osrhoene and the Praetavi Arabs around Singara.⁷² Like the other elements of the list, *praefectura Mesopotamiae* refers to a spatial area containing urban areas (Anthemusia and Nicephorium). To the modern reader, the progression from Osrhoene to *praefectura Mesopotamiae* to the region

67 Pliny *NH* 6.117–120.

68 Pliny *NH* 5.89–90.

69 Pliny *NH* 5.89: "oppidum Parthorum ad Euphraten". For the identification of this place as Isidore's Phaliga, see Chapter 4.

70 Pliny *NH* 6.120–130.

71 In addition to Babylon, Seleucia, Ctesiphon and Vologesocerta (6.122), Pliny specifically notes several others (*sunt etiamnum in Mesopotamia oppida*): Hippareni, Orcheni, Notitae, Orothophanitae and Gnesiochartae.

72 Pliny *NH* 5.86: "iungitur praefectura Mesopotamiae, ab Assyriis originem trahens, in qua Anthemusia et Nicephorium oppida". The list structure of Pliny's work is discussed in Chapter 4.

of Singara brings to mind the later Roman provincial organisation: *Osrhoena*, a province centred on Edessa, and *Mesopotamia*, a province with its capital at Amida on the Tigris to the east.⁷³ However, we have no evidence of a Roman administrative organisation on the east side of the Euphrates until Trajan at the earliest, or more securely, by the time of Lucius Verus.⁷⁴ Moreover, the two *oppida* mentioned as part of this *praefectura Mesopotamiae*, Anthemusia and Nicephorium, lie west and south of Osrhoene as Pliny defines it (around Edessa and Carrhae) as Map 3.4 shows. Anthemusia and Nicephorium are usually depicted as part of Roman *Osrhoena* rather than Roman *Mesopotamia*. What was the nature of this *praefectura*?

Pliny's note that the origin of the "*praefectura Mesopotamiae*" is derived "*ab Assyriis*" raises the question of what Pliny meant by *ab Assyriis* and whether we can infer anything about the geographical space from that phrase. Did Pliny mean to indicate a degree of continuity between a Parthian political structure and that employed by the Assyrians, even if the extent of that continuity was toponymic or geographical? In this phrase, "Assyrians" refers to a collective but is not specific as to whether it refers to a political entity (the Assyrian Empire) or a cultural entity (the Assyrian people), each of which varied in geographical extent over time. As a political term, the geographical bounds of Assyria varied from the original heartland around Aššur to an empire encompassing much of the Fertile Crescent, from southern Babylonia to southern Palestine and into the Taurus Mountains.⁷⁵ Pliny is certainly aware of the former use of "Assyria"; in his initial description of Syria, he notes that Adiabene was once called Assyria ("*Adiabene Assyria ante dicta*").⁷⁶ The terms Syria and Assyria were used somewhat interchangeably by many classical authors.⁷⁷ Rollinger has demonstrated that the two terms were also used interchangeably in 8th century BCE Anatolia and were most likely encountered by the Greeks as synonyms already.⁷⁸

Numerous Greek and Roman authors mention and discuss the Assyrians. The mythologised figure of the Assyrian queen Semiramis held a particular

73 Amida is modern Diyarbakır in Turkey. It had also been a provincial capital in Neo-Assyrian empire of the 9th–7th century BCE, Postgate (1995).

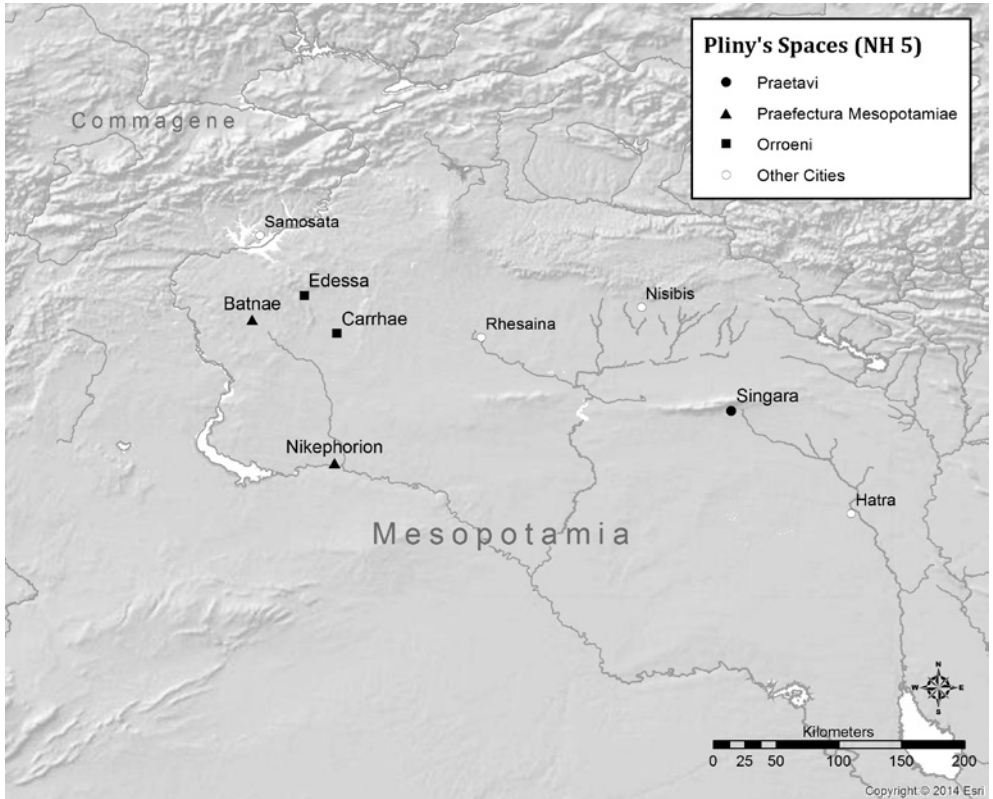
74 For a discussion of the historical circumstances and the debate, see Chapter 1.

75 Wilkinson et al. (2005) 46, fig. 15; Parpola and Porter (2001).

76 Pliny *NH* 5.66.

77 For example, Hdt 7.63. Rollinger (2006); Andrade (2013) 6; Frye (1992) 283; contra Parpola (2004) 21; and less convincingly Joseph (1997). However, Andrade (2014) shows how provincial Syrians writing in Greek could maintain complex and nuanced distinctions between the two terms for their own representational purposes.

78 Rollinger supports the main thesis of Frye (1992); Parpola (2004) 16–18 also notes that unstressed initial vowels or syllables were often dropped in neo-Assyrian.



MAP 3.4 *Praefectura Mesopotamiae* in context

fascination. Diodorus, Pompeius Trogus and Strabo all describe her and her works and deeds at some length.⁷⁹ Moreover, Strabo refers to “those who have written histories of the Syrian Empire” (οἱ δ’ ἱστοροῦντες τὴν Σύρων ἀρχὴν).⁸⁰ The historical memory of the Assyrians may have been confused with legend to a degree by the Roman period, but it was nevertheless present, available for use by Roman authors, and still attached to the geographical space of the historical neo-Assyrian Empire. Frye argues that “Assyrian” and “Syrian” were ethnolinguistic terms by which the Greeks understood the Aramaic-speaking population of the Fertile Crescent.⁸¹ Parpola goes further to propose that this

79 For example: Diodorus 2.5ff.; Justin 1.1–3; Strabo 2.1.16; 2.1.31; 15.1.5–6; 15.2.5; 16.1.2. For a discussion of the role of Semiramis in Strabo’s geography, see Cameron (Forthcoming).

80 Strabo 16.1.2; Biffi (2002) 132.

81 Frye (1992) 282; Heinrichs (1993) 104.

Aramaic-speaking population had a sense of national identity as “Assyrians”.⁸² Nöldeke and Schwartz see the use of “Assyria” as referring to the political formation of the neo-Assyrians and the geographical scope of that empire.⁸³ Although the terms used by these scholars are controversial, the evidence they present speaks to a high level of perceived cultural coherence among the Aramaic-speaking population of the Mesopotamian Borderland in the imagination of Greek and Roman authors.⁸⁴

Pliny uses *praefectura* most often as a technical term of administrative organisation, thus we might expect that he here means Assyria as a political unit.⁸⁵ The neo-Assyrian Empire was known to the Greeks from Herodotus, our earliest complete historical source. The Ionian historian promises, but does not deliver, a history of Assyria.⁸⁶ However, his account of the rise of the Achaemenid Empire begins with the destruction of the Assyrian Empire. In that narrative, he conceives of Assyria as the wider political formation of the neo-Assyrian Empire rather than the narrower geographical area around the Assyrian capitals on the Tigris.⁸⁷ Specifically, Herodotus considers Babylonia (Akkad) as an

82 Parpola (2004) 8–11, although Parpola’s use of the United States to illustrate his argument that new citizens will attain a homogeneous national identity by the third generation unintentionally problematises his position on the presence of an Assyrian national identity in the neo-Assyrian empire. Heinrichs (1993) discusses the linguistic and cultural vectors by which the term “Assyrian” came to be adopted by the modern Assyrians.

83 Nöldeke (1881); Schwartz (1931); Schwartz (1932); Rollinger (2006).

84 McGing (2012).

85 Pliny most often uses *praefectura* to refer to subdivisions of Roman administrative authority, usually defined spatially. He specifically refers to the *nomes* of Egypt as *praefecturae* (Pliny *NH* 5.49; 19.11; 28.121; 36.87) as well as the *strategiae* of Armenia (Pliny *NH* 6.27; 5.83). On other occasions, he uses *praefectura* to refer to a community in Etruria (Pliny *NH* 3.52), the office of the Urban Prefect at Rome (Pliny *NH* 7.62), and a personal charge given to a slave (Pliny *NH* 28.56).

86 Hdt. 1.184.

87 Hdt. 1.188–200. When describing the important spaces of the Persian Empire, Herodotus (4.39) specifies Persia, Assyria and Arabia as the major parts: “Ἡ δὲ δὴ ἐτέρη ἀπὸ Περσέων ἀρξαμένη παρατέταται ἐς τὴν Ἑρυθρὴν θάλασσαν, ἣ τε Περσικὴ καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης ἐκδεκομένη ἢ Ἀσσυρίῃ καὶ ἀπὸ Ἀσσυρίης ἢ Ἀραβίῃ· λήγει δὲ αὕτη, οὐ λήγουσα εἰ μὴ νόμῳ, ἐς τὸν κόλπον τὸν Ἀράβιον, ἐς τὸν Δαρείος ἐκ τοῦ Νείλου διώρυχα ἐσήγαγε· μέχρι μὲν νυν Φοινίκης ἀπὸ Περσέων χάρος πλατὺς καὶ πολλὸς ἐστί, τὸ δ’ ἀπὸ Φοινίκης παρῆκει διὰ τῆσδε τῆς θαλάσσης ἢ ἀκτὴ αὕτη παρὰ τε Συρίην τὴν Παλαιστίνην καὶ Αἴγυπτον, ἐς τὴν τελευτᾷ· ἐν τῇ ἔθνεά ἐστι τρία μούνα.” (But the second, beginning with Persia, stretches to the Red Sea, being the Persian land, and next the neighbouring country of Assyria, and after Assyria, Arabia; this promontory ends (yet not truly but only by common consent) at the Arabian Gulf, whereunto Darius brought a canal from the Nile. Now from the Persian country to Phoenice there is a wide and great tract of land; and from Phoenice this promontory runs beside our sea by the way of the Syrian Palestine and Egypt, which is at the end of it; in this promontory there are but three nations.) Loeb trans. It would be remarkable if lower Mesopotamia failed

integral part of Assyria, as does Strabo.⁸⁸ Later, Herodotus equates Syria and Assyria and defines the latter as the lands inhabited by the Assyrians.⁸⁹

Pliny's note on the Assyrian origins of the *praefectura Mesopotamiae* makes sense in the context of the neo-Assyrian administration. Both Nisibis and Harran (Carrhae) were important regional administrative centres of the neo-Assyrian Empire from the ninth to seventh centuries. Nisibis is notably absent from Pliny's description, but would be a natural centre to describe a political division spanning Mesopotamia and with Assyrian administrative heritage. Assyrian administrative divisions in the Fertile Crescent were not significantly altered by the subsequent empires and dynasties. The Achaemenids and Seleucids seem to have retained much the same organisational structure in the region.⁹⁰ In Pliny's time, all these regions to the east of the Euphrates were nominally Parthian territory: "nominally" in that the Euphrates formed a conceptual and symbolic boundary in geopolitical terms and was reinforced as such at the highest levels of government by repeated performance of interstate rituals on the river during the first century CE.⁹¹ Pliny never explicitly mentions this division of space and, as we shall see, deliberately complicates it. Nevertheless, Pliny's use of *praefectura* here probably indicates his understanding of Mesopotamia as a unit of Parthian administration. According to Pliny's narrative, Anthemusia and Nicephorium both lay within this Parthian *praefectura*, while Carrhae and Edessa were associated with the Orroeni Arabs. How accurately this understanding of northern Mesopotamia reflects the reality of Parthian administration is difficult to determine.

to be included in such a list, but it is consistent with the rest of his work for Herodotus to have subsumed Babylonia into "Assyria".

88 Strabo 16.1.1. On Babylonia becoming a de facto part of Assyria in 731 BCE when Tiglath-Pileser III assumed the kingship of Babylon, see Parpola (2004) 8, n. 17. There are a number of correspondences between Herodotus' description of Babylonia and Strabo's, not least of all that both include a lengthy description of sacred prostitution in Babylon: Herodotus, 1.199; Strabo 16.1.20.

89 Hdt. 2.17: "...Αἴγυπτον μὲν πάσαν εἶναι αὐτήν τὴν ὑπ' Αἰγυπτίων οἰκομένην, κατὰ περ Κιλικίην τὴν ὑπὸ Κιλικίων καὶ Ἀσσυρίην τὴν ὑπὸ Ἀσσυρίων..." (... Egypt is all the country inhabited by Egyptians, just as Cilicia is that inhabited by Cilicians and Assyria by Assyrians ...); 7.63: "Οὗτοι δὲ ὑπὸ μὲν Ἑλλήνων ἐκαλέοντο Σύριοι, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν βαρβάρων Ἀσσύριοι ἐκλήθησαν." (These are called Syrians by Greeks, but Assyrians by foreigners.).

90 As discussed above, in relation to Strabo's *Geography*.

91 For example: Plut. *Sulla* 5.3–4; *Luc.* 24; Vell. Pat. 2.101.1–3; Dio 55.10.18–19; Tac. *Ann.* 2.58.1–2. For a discussion of the notion of "independence" within the "Parthian Commonwealth", see de Jong (2013) 148–51.

3 Claudius Ptolemy

Ptolemy's *Geography* divides the world into sections for the purpose of constructing a map. He structures the work such that a reader attempting to do so could begin with northwest in the upper-left corner of a map oriented with north at the top and draw the sections in the order he presents with as little as possible danger of smudging the previously drawn sections with the drawing hand.⁹² Ptolemy reaches the Fertile Crescent in book 5, in which he describes the boundaries, features and settlements of the borderland areas, Syria Coele (5.15), Mesopotamia (5.18), Arabia Deserta (5.19), and Assyria (6.1), as well as the adjacent regions of Greater Armenia (5.13) and Babylonia (5.20).

For each region Ptolemy describes, he begins with an explicit description of its boundaries, usually in terms of the adjacent regions in his system. The boundaries of Ptolemy's "Arrangement of Mesopotamia" (Μεσοποταμίας θέσις) conform largely to those of previous Roman geographers:

Mesopotamia is bounded on the north by the region of Greater Armenia already mentioned, on the west by the part of the Euphrates River near Syria (previously described), on the east by the part of the Tigris River near Assyria, from there to the part of Armenia as far as the altars of Heracles ... To the south, the remaining part of the Euphrates near the Arabian Desert as far as navigable ... And from Babylon up to the connection to the Tigris and the aforementioned altars ...⁹³

92 Ptol. *Geog.* 2.1.4: "Προειλόμεθα δὲ τάξιν τοῦ περὶ τὴν καταγραφὴν εὐχρήστου πανταχῇ ποιούμενοι πρόνοιαν, τούτεστι καθ' ἣν ἐπὶ δεξιὰ ποιησόμεθα τὰς μεταβάσεις, ἀπὸ τῶν ἤδη κατατεταγμένων ἐπὶ τὰ μηδέπω τῆς χειρὸς ἐκλαμβανομένης. Τοῦτο δὲ γένοιτ' ἂν, εἰ γράφοιτο τὰ τε βορειότερα πρότερα τῶν νοτιωτέρων καὶ τὰ δυσμικώτερα τῶν ἀπηνλιωτικωτέρων, ὅτι πρὸς τὰς τῶν ἐγγραφόντων ἢ ἐντυγχανόντων ὅψεις ἄνω μὲν ἡμῖν ὑπόκειται τὰ βορειότερα, δεξιὰ δὲ τὰ ἀπηνλιωτικώτερα τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐπὶ τε τῆς σφαίρας καὶ τοῦ πίνακος." (We have chosen an order [of presentation] with forethought to convenience in the drawing of the map in every respect, namely progressing toward the right, with the hand proceeding from the things which had already been inscribed to those that have not yet [been inscribed]: this would be achieved by having the more northern [places] drawn before the more southerly ones, and the more western before the more eastern, because our convention is that "up" with respect to the map-makers' or spectators' view means "north," and "right" means "east" in the *oikumene*, both on a globe and on a planar map.) Translation Berggren and Jones (2000).

93 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.18.1: "Ἡ Μεσοποταμία περιρίζεται ἀπὸ μὲν ἄρκτων τῷ ἐκτεθειμένῳ μέρει τῆς Μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας, ἀπὸ δὲ δύσεως τῷ ἐκτεθειμένῳ παρὰ τὴν Συρίαν τοῦ Εὐφράτου ποταμοῦ μέρει, ἀπὸ δὲ ἀνατολῶν τῷ παρὰ τὴν Ἀσσυρίαν μέρει τοῦ Τίγριδος ποταμοῦ τῷ ἀπὸ τοῦ πρὸς τῇ Ἀρμενίᾳ τμήματος μέχρι τῶν τοῦ Ἡρακλέους Βωμῶν... ἀπὸ δὲ μεσημβρίας τῷ λοιπῷ μέρει τοῦ Εὐφράτου παρὰ μὲν τὴν Ἐρημον Ἀραβίαν μέχρι πέρατος... παρὰ δὲ τὴν Βαβυλωνίαν μέχρι

Ptolemy gives Mesopotamia five edges: Greater Armenia, the Euphrates near Syria to the west, the Euphrates to the south near Arabia Deserta, Babylonia, and the Tigris near Assyria. Thus Ptolemy bounds Mesopotamia by the two rivers, defines the northern boundary as Armenia, and maintains a distinction between upper Mesopotamia (Mesopotamia) and lower Mesopotamia (Babylonia). At this level of detail, Ptolemy's delimitation of "Mesopotamia" aligns with that of Strabo.⁹⁴

Considering the regions adjacent to Ptolemy's Mesopotamia reinforces this view of his delimitation of Mesopotamia and, in the case of the northern and southern boundaries, allows a more detailed examination. Ptolemy places Syria Coele and Arabia Deserta, both bounded in the expected way by the Euphrates River, to the west and southwest. East of the Tigris, Ptolemy's Assyria includes the entire plain below the Niphates and Zagros Mountains, including the plains north of Nineveh and as far south as Ctesiphon and Sittacene.⁹⁵

The northern boundary of Ptolemy's Babylonia, that with Mesopotamia, is further south than we might expect.⁹⁶ Ptolemy included the two most politically important cities of Babylonia in the regions to the north; Seleucia on the Tigris in Mesopotamia (5.18.8) and Ctesiphon in Assyria (6.1.3). Ptolemy locates the cities of Babylonia in five areas, the two northernmost of which are those near the Euphrates and those along the river which flows through Babylon.⁹⁷ In that second set, Ptolemy includes Babylon, the canal Naarmalcha, Vologaises, and Borsippa.⁹⁸ This corresponds to the boundary that Ptolemy drew between

τῆς πρὸς τὸν Τίγριν συναφῆς καὶ τοὺς εἰρημένους Βωμοὺς..." Except where they are directly relevant, my quotations from Ptolemy will omit his coordinates. The best critical edition of Ptolemy's *Geography* is now Stückelberger and Grasshoff (2006).

- 94 Strabo 16.1.21. Pliny does not define the boundary between Mesopotamia and Babylonia.
- 95 Νῖνος and Κτησιφῶν (6.1.3). Among the districts, Sittacene lies near Susiana ("ἡ δὲ παρὰ τὴν Σουσιανὴν Σιττακηνή", 6.1.2), previously defined as the southern boundary (6.1.1). Kalachene (ἡ Καλακινή, 6.1.2) lay north of Nineveh.
- 96 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.20.1: "Ἡ Βαβυλωνία περιορίζεται ἀπὸ μὲν ἄρκτων Μεσσοποταμίᾳ κατὰ τὸ ἐκτεθειμένον τοῦ Εὐφράτου μέρος, ἀπὸ δὲ δύσεως τῇ Ἐρήμῳ Ἀραβίᾳ κατὰ τὴν εἰρημένην ὄρειν, ἀπὸ δὲ ἀνατολῶν Σουσιανῇ παρὰ τὸ λοιπὸν τοῦ Τίγριδος μέρος μέχρι τῶν εἰς τὸν Περσικὸν κόλπον ἐκβολῶν..." (In the north, Babylonia borders on that part of Mesopotamia next to the Euphrates, to the west Arabia desert near the desolate hills, to the east Susiana near the remaining part of the Tigris as it flows out into the Persian Gulf.).
- 97 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.20.6: "Παρὰ δὲ τὸ τοῦ Εὐφράτου ποταμοῦ μέρος (πόλεις αἵδε)... καὶ ἐπὶ μὲν τοῦ διὰ Βαβυλῶνος ρέοντος ποταμοῦ..." (The cities in the part near the Euphrates River are ... and on the river that flows through Babylon ...).
- 98 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.20.6: Βαβυλῶν, πρὸς δὲ τῷ Νααρσάρῃ ποταμῷ, Οὐολ[ο]γαισία, Βόρσιππα. Stückelberger and Grasshoff (2006) 592 amends Μααρσάρῃ to Νααρσάρῃ and Βάρσιττα to Βόρσιππα. Weissbach ('Naarmalcha' *RE*) notes that Marses is a corruption of the name found in cuneiform inscriptions, Naarsares or Nar Sarri (Naarmalcha), canal of the king.

Mesopotamia and Babylonia in his description of the former: specifically, that it ran along “the connection to the Tigris” (τῆς πρὸς τὸν Τίγριν συνὰφης). Ptolemy draws the northern boundary of Babylonia along the most convenient water boundary, the Naarmalcha canal, which connects the Euphrates to the Tigris. He places the cities that lay north of that water course in Mesopotamia and those to the south in Babylonia. Similarly, he places the cities on the east side of the Tigris (like Ctesiphon) in Assyria rather than Babylonia. Where bodies of water were available, Ptolemy preferred to define space according to their courses, and he did so strictly. To the north, however, there was no convenient river by which to delimit Mesopotamia.

Ptolemy defines the boundary between Greater Armenia and Mesopotamia according to the Taurus, between the places through which the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers cut.⁹⁹ As well as those points, he gives coordinate information for the sources of both rivers in Armenia and notes that the Tigris flows through Lake Thospitis (“λίμνην τὴν καλουμένην Θωσπίτιν”).¹⁰⁰ Ptolemy uses those sources and Lake Thospitis to locate the district of Anzitene (“Ἀνζιτηνὴ (Ἀνζιτίνῃ)”).¹⁰¹ If the identification of Lake Van with Thospitis is correct, then Ptolemy is describing the course of the Botan, not the upper Tigris, just as Strabo did. Tozer (1897) 268 This would make Anzitene a region on the southern slopes of the Taurus, north of the Tigris and west of the Botan. Ptolemy places Gordyene in Armenia east of the source of the “Tigris”, and locates Tigranocerta within Gordyene.¹⁰² This placement of Gordyene on the southeast side of the Botan and east of the Tigris proper is consistent with earlier classical sources like Strabo and Xenophon.¹⁰³

It is clear, especially from the boundaries that Ptolemy assigns, that Ptolemy’s conception of the Mesopotamian Borderland was predominantly geographical. His geography attempts to construct a rigorous and objective account of space by precise quantification of every relevant geographical feature

See also Kessler, Karlheinz ‘Naarmalcha’ *BNP*; Dillemann (1962) 153; Van Laere (1982). The first set of cities (Παρά τὸ τοῦ Εὐφράτου ποταμοῦ μέρος) comprises Ἰδικάρα, Δούραβα, Θάκκονα, Θελεβεγκάνη.

99 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.13.4.

100 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.13.7.

101 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.13.18: “Ἐν δὲ τῷ λοιπῷ καὶ μεσημβρινωτέρῳ τμήματι μεταξὺ μὲν τοῦ Εὐφράτου καὶ τῶν τοῦ Τίγριδος πηγῶν ἢ τε Ἀνζιτηνὴ (Ἀνζιτίνῃ) καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτὴν ἢ Θωσπίτις, εἶτα Κοριαία.”

102 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.13.20, 22.

103 Although note that Strabo, who takes a more ethnographic view than Ptolemy, has the lands of the Gordyeneans extending on both sides of the Tigris south (downstream) of its confluence with the Botan. See the previous discussion of Strabo’s placement of Gordyene above, p. 96.

for which he had information. He makes no mention of the political formations which occupied the spaces he describes; those political formations are only evident indirectly. By comparing his work with modern geographical, archaeological and historical knowledge, we can see that his knowledge becomes weaker as his text moves further from the Roman Empire.¹⁰⁴

4 The *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*

The stated goal of the *Expositio Totius Mundi* is to describe all the barbarian nations and Roman provinces and the cities and outstanding features of the latter.¹⁰⁵ The text begins by describing tribes far to the east of the Roman Empire, eventually reaching in turn the Persians, the Saraceni and Roman territory. The *Expositio* then proceeds province by province around the empire, briefly describing the province, its inhabitants, and one or two of its major cities. This goal is noble, ambitious and, by modern standards, unrealised.

Non-Roman space appears as a simple list of areas, designated as either geographical (*regio*) or ethnic (*gens*). The items on the list are sparsely described and extremely selective, but allow for a clear contrast between “barbarian” space and the Roman provinces.¹⁰⁶ Non-Roman space is divided from Roman space by a citation attributing the preceding information to an unnamed *historicus*.¹⁰⁷ This marks a break between information explicitly gathered from the unnamed third party and information over which the *Expositio* implicitly claims a more expert knowledge. As the *Expositio* begins to describe Roman

104 For Ptolemy on India, see Parker (2008a) 74–76.

105 *Expositio* 2: “Quaerentes autem scribere, debemus dicere primum [quando mundus a deo fuerit institutus dehinc] quae gentes ab oriente usque ad occidentem constitutae sint; post hoc quanta sint genera barbarorum, deinde omnem Romanorum terram, quot sint in omni mundo provinciae, vel quales in substantia ac potestate; quae civitates in singulis provinciis habeant et quid in unaquaque provincia aut civitate possit esse praecipuum. Munificum enim hoc opus et studiosum mihi esse videtur” (But seeking to write, we ought to say first [...] which nations have been established from the east to the west; after this, how many kinds of barbarians, then the whole land of the Romans, how many provinces there are in the whole world, or what kind of wealth and power they have; which cities are in each province and what is outstanding in every province and city. For this work seems to me to be liberal and studious.) The concerns of the *Expositio* are primarily commercial and will be discussed in Chapter 6.

106 Rougé (1966) 56–69. See chapter 4 for further discussion.

107 *Expositio*, 21: “et haec quidem de praedictis gentibus historicus ait.” (And in fact, an historian says this about the preceding peoples).

space, the author re-asserts his authority over his material with a first-person statement of intent, reiterating the spatial division in the text.¹⁰⁸

The greater depth of information and complexity of topological information in the descriptions which follow support this implicit claim. Roman space begins with Mesopotamia:

After this is our land; for Mesopotamia and Osrhoene follow. Indeed, Mesopotamia has many diverse cities; I wish to speak of those which are outstanding. Namely, Nisibis and Amida,¹⁰⁹ which have men who are the best men in all things, very acute in business, and good salesmen.¹¹⁰ The cities are especially wealthy and supplied with all goods: for they receive sellers from Persia into the whole Roman Empire and send back buyers. Except bronze and iron, since it is not permitted to give bronze or iron to foreigners. But those cities ever-standing by means of the forethought of the gods and the emperor, having famous walls, always destroy the courage of the Persians in war. Fervent in business and dealing well with every province. Then Edessa of Osdroenae, also a very splendid city.¹¹¹

The *Expositio* does not precisely define the boundaries of the spaces it describes. Rather, it treats Mesopotamia and Osrhoene as area spaces filled or dotted with freely floating and unlocated points (cities). The rest of the Roman world is treated as an agglomeration of such area spaces and unlocated points.

108 *Expositio*, 21: "Quoniam vero necessarium est et nostram terram, hoc est Romanorum, conscribere, experiar exponere, ut possit legentibus prodesse. Incipiamus ergo" (Since truly it is necessary to survey our land, that is, the land of the Romans, I will attempt to explain so that it can be useful to readers. So we will begin.).

109 Edessa is mentioned twice in the manuscripts. The first instance, about a city in Mesopotamia, is taken to refer to Amida, rather than Edessa in Osrhoene. The second instance is the famous Edessa worthy of being ranked and described alongside Nisibis, which the *Expositio* correctly locates in Osrhoene. There is no hint in this historical record that another city called Edessa existed in Mesopotamia. Rougé (1966) 156; Woodman (1964) 54; Ross (2001) 15.

110 For the emendation of *venantes* to *vendentes*, see Chapter 6.

111 *Expositio* 22: "Post hos nostra terra est. Sequitur enim Mesopotamia et Osdroena. Mesopotamia quidem habet civitates multas et varias, quarum excellentes sunt quas volo dicere. Sunt ergo Nisibis et <Amida>, quae in omnibus viros habent optimos et in negotio valde acutos et bene <vendentes>. Praecipue et divites et omnibus bonis ornati sunt: accipientes enim a Persis ipsi in omnem terram Romanorum vendentes et ementes iterum tradunt, extra aeramen et ferrum, quia non licet hostibus dare aeramen aut ferrum. Istaе autem civitates semper stantes deorum et imperatoris sapientia, habentes moenia inclita, bello semper virtutem Persarum dissolvunt; ferventes negotiis et tranigentes cum omni provincia bene. Deinde Osdroenae Edessa et ipsa civitas splendida."

Those points are connected by commercial activities, particularly the flow of trade goods from point to point between cities and across local and “international” boundaries, but those boundaries are not described. Although the spaces denominated as “Mesopotamia and Osrhoene” are not specifically labelled as *provincia*, the text does not use that technical term consistently for spaces that align with Roman provinces. The only geographical clues the *Expositio* gives are the cities which it places within the broader spaces: Nisibis and Amida (or perhaps Edessa) in Mesopotamia and Edessa in Osrhoene. The spaces of the two provinces are not delimited individually or as the unit into which the text aggregates them, instead it is left to the reader to identify the names which the text provides. In the absence of contrary information, the identification of the two names as representing the contemporary Roman provinces seems likely.

The *Expositio* uses categories which could be defined geographically (provinces and regions), but it does not define them in this way itself. It relies on the reader’s prior knowledge of Roman administrative geography and applies the information about which it is concerned atop that knowledge. It does not attempt to organise space, but assumes a known organisational structure and makes qualitative statements about features within it. The precise meaning of “Mesopotamia” is left implicit, as are the borders of that space. Nevertheless, it is clear from the text that the spaces described are those of the fourth-century empire.

5 Ammianus Marcellinus

Because of the incomplete survival of Ammianus’ history and the loss of his descriptions of the Roman provinces of *Mesopotamia* and *Osrhoena*, his understanding of the term “Mesopotamia” is not directly available. However, we can glimpse their presence and their boundaries indirectly through references to adjacent Roman and Sasanian regions. Three sections of his work are useful in this regard. The first is his general survey of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. The second section is his excursus on the regions of the Persian Empire, especially his account of “Assyria”; that region included Adiabene and southern Mesopotamia, both of which he describes largely in terms of the cities within them. The description of the regions of the Persian Empire falls within the third relevant section of his work: Ammianus’ description of Julian’s invasion of the Persian region of Assyria in 363 BCE. This is the most complete account of a military expedition along the Euphrates route. It contains a number of geographical details concerning cities, towns and fortresses along the

routes to and from Ctesiphon, but it is most important for what it tells us about the borders between Roman and Sasanian space both along the Euphrates and near Nisibis, including, importantly, that there was a border.¹¹²

5.1 *Eastern Provinces*

Near the start of the extant portion of his work, Ammianus describes the *orientales provinciae*, beginning with Cilicia and Isauria and ending with Arabia.¹¹³ Unfortunately, Ammianus had already described Mesopotamia in an earlier book, now lost, and he declines to repeat or elaborate on that description.¹¹⁴ Here, Ammianus is referring to “Mesopotamia” as a geographical region, presumably including the Roman province of *Mesopotamia*, but also including the province of *Osdroena*.¹¹⁵ There is no evidence in the surviving books of any attempt at a systematic view of the empire; Ammianus’ gaze does not fall on a region except to set the scene for some sort of conflict. As his period excludes the period during which Syria was incorporated into the empire, he may not have had cause to discuss its geography in any detail beyond this section on the eastern provinces. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Ammianus usually delimited space according to political and administrative divisions, as might be expected from a man employed by the imperial administration.

5.2 *Persian Regiones*

The second of Ammianus’ provincial surveys occurs at the beginning of his account of Julian’s expedition against southern Mesopotamia in 363 CE.¹¹⁶ Suitably for such a context, Ammianus begins with a short historical summary of the history of the Mesopotamian Borderland before the expedition, beginning with the arrangement of places (*locorum situm*) itself.¹¹⁷ He begins

¹¹² On the Roman conception of a *limes* in the time of Ammianus, see Drijvers (2011).

¹¹³ Amm. Marc. 14.8. Egypt would be included, but Ammianus defers that description for later in his work (it occurs at Amm. Marc. 22.15–16), Amm. Marc. 14.7.21.

¹¹⁴ Amm. Marc. 14.7.21: “... absque Mesopotamia, iam digesta cum bella Parthica narrarentur ...” (...except Mesopotamia which has already been described along with the Parthian wars ...).

¹¹⁵ Amm. Marc. 14.8.7: “Et prima post Osdroenam quam, ut dictum est, ab hac descriptione discrevimus, Commagena (nunc Euphratensis), clementer assurgit, Hierapoli (vetere Nino) et Samosata civitatibus amplis illustris.” (And first after Osdroene, which, as has been said, I have omitted from this account, Commagene, now called Euphratensis, gradually rises, famed for the great cities of Hierapolis (ancient Ninus) and Samosata.).

¹¹⁶ Amm. Marc. 23.6.1–74.

¹¹⁷ History of imperial conflicts in the borderland: Amm. Marc. 23.6.2–9. Amm. Marc. 23.6.10: “Nunc locorum situm (quantum ratio sinit), carptim breviterque absolvam.”

by describing the Persian Gulf and attempting to situate the Persian Empire relative to it:

And as the pens of geographers have formed it, the whole circuit just described is given this form. In the northern direction, to the Caspian Gates it borders on the Cadusii, on many tribes of the Scythians, and on the Arimaspse, wild, one-eyed men. On the west it touches Armenia, Niphates, the Asiatic Albani, the Red Sea, and the Skenitai Arabs, whom men of later times called the Saracens. It looks down on Mesopotamia under the southern sky. Opposite the eastern face it extends to the Ganges River, which cuts through the lands of the Indians and empties into the southern ocean.¹¹⁸

The first clause of this passage can be read as evidence that Ammianus had knowledge of maps of the Persian Empire, but as with many such possible literary references to maps, the words are ambiguous.¹¹⁹ The pens of the geographers (*geographici stili*) could form or shape (*formarunt*) a literary narrative as well as they could shape a map, although the most natural use of *formare* would denote an image or shape of some sort;¹²⁰ *forma* was the usual word used to denote a map or cadastral plan.¹²¹ Globes were certainly known to Strabo and Ptolemy, so there is no problem in allowing Ammianus access to one.

Ammianus introduces his description of the Persian Empire with a brief overview of the whole, framed as a circuit of the Persian Gulf. He describes the Gulf and its coastline,¹²² then the places and people beyond the outer boundaries of the Persian Empire,¹²³ then gives a list of the administrative districts that comprise the empire (see Map 3.5: Ammianus' Circuitus).¹²⁴

118 Amm. Marc. 23.6.13: "Utque geographici stili formarunt, hac specie distinguitur omnis circuitus ante dictus. Ab arctoo cardine usque ad Caspiae portas, Cadusiis conterminat et Scytharum gentibus multis et Arimaspis hominibus luscis et feris. Ab occidua plaga contingit Armenios et Niphaten et in Asia sitos Albanos, Mare Rubrum et Scenitas Arabas quos Saracenos posteritas appellavit: Mesopotamiam sub axe meridiali despectat: orienti a fronte contrarius ad Gangem extenditur flumen, quod Indorum intersecans terras, in pelagus eiectionatur australe."

119 Sundwall (1996) 622 n. 17 suggests that 23.6.13 may reflect a map of Persia.

120 Boeft et al. (1998) 144–45.

121 Dilke (1985) esp. 196.

122 Amm. Marc. 23.6.10–12.

123 Amm. Marc. 23.6.13.

124 Amm. Marc. 23.6.14.



MAP 3.5 Ammianus' *Circuitus*

To the north of the empire, Ammianus places the Caspian Gates, the Cadusians, the Scythians and the mythical Arimaspe;¹²⁵ to the west he has Armenia, Niphates, the Asiatic Albani, the Red Sea, and the Skenitai Arabs;¹²⁶ to the east lies the Ganges and India. However, he then places Mesopotamia to the south (*Mesopotamiam sub axe meridiali despectat* "it looks down on Mesopotamia under the southern sky"). Ammianus purports to describe the Persian Empire as a circuit around the Persian Gulf, so we might expect that gulf to be the centre from which the narrative looks out, but this is not the case. The best fit for an imaginary central viewing point that has the Caspian Gates, the Cadusians, the Scythians and the mythical Arimaspe to the north, Armenia, Niphates,

125 The Cadusians were an Iranian people dwelling south of the Caspian Sea, not to be confused with the Cardusians/Gordyaeans: Strabo 11.8.1; von Bredow, *Iris* 'Cadusii' *BNP*. Arimaspe: Hdt. 4.13.1.

126 For the Niphates, see the discussion of the source of the Tigris in Strabo, above. The Albani dwelt in the Caucasus region, north of Armenia: von Bredow, *Iris* 'Albani' *BNP*.

the Asiatic Albani, the Red Sea, and the Skenitai Arabs to the west, the Ganges and India to the east, and Mesopotamia (alone!) to the south, is somewhere in Media or the Zagros Mountains. This hints that Ammianus' description of the Persian Empire relied on a source composed in Media, perhaps at Ecbatana. Indeed, the description never identifies any space as Roman, which may hint that the ultimate source was composed in the Persian Empire.¹²⁷

Ammianus' list of the Persian *regiones* begins at Assyria and proceeds more or less clockwise around the empire:

However there are in all Persia these greatest regions, administered by *vitaxae* (which are commanders of cavalry), and kings and satraps – for it is difficult and unnecessary to count the large number of lesser divisions – Assyria, Susiana, Media, Persis, Parthia, Greater Carmania, Hyrcania, Margiana, the Bactriani, the Sogdiani, the Sacae, Scythia at the foot of Imaus [the Himalayas] and beyond the same mountain, Serica, Aria, the Paropanisadae, Drangiana, Arachosia, and Gedrosia.¹²⁸

These regions are explicitly administrative; each is under the care of a *vitaxa* (glossed as a *magister equitum: quas vitaxae (id est magistri equitum) curant*).¹²⁹ Ammianus follows the clockwise arrangement set out by this introductory passage in the geographical narrative that follows, with a passage on Arabia Felix inserted between those describing Parthia and Greater Carmania. According to this division of space, Ammianus' section on Assyria describes those parts of the Mesopotamian plain controlled by Sasanid Persia and adjacent to

127 On the composition and sources of Ammianus' history, see Matthews (1989) 17–32; Kelly (2008) 222–55. While Ammianus is consistent in his use of the name “Mesopotamia” to mean the Roman province, it is possible that if this reference comes from a Persian source, a geographical term which includes part or all of Babylonia may have been translated as Mesopotamia and included by Ammianus. There are tantalising similarities between the style of Ammianus' description of the Persian *regiones* and the 6th century CE Middle Persian list of administrative centers and divisions, *Šahrestānīhā-ī Ērānšahr*; for that text, see Daryaei (2002).

128 Amm. Marc. 23.6.14: “Sunt autem in omni Perside, hae regiones maximae, quas vitaxae (id est magistri equitum) curant, et reges et satrapae – nam minores plurimas recensere difficile est et superfluum – Assyria, Susiana, Media, Persis, Parthia, Carmania maior, Hyrcania, Margiana, Bactriani, Sogdiani, Sacae, Scythia infra Imaum et ultra eundem montem, Serica, Aria, Paropanisadae, Drangiana, Arachosia et Gedrosia.” This list corresponds to the order and contents of Ptolemy *Geog.* 6, except for the omission in Ammianus' list of Arabia, but which he does nevertheless describe (Amm. Marc. 23.6.45–47), Boeft et al. (1998) 146–47.

129 A *vitaxa* (Persian *Bidaxš*, Greek *βιτάχης, πιτάχης*, Armenian *bdeašχ*) is a toparch or marcher-lord, Sunderman, “*Bidaxš*,” *Elran* 4.242–44; Boeft et al. (1998) 146; Garsoïan (1989) 516–17; Shahîd (1984) 119–20, n. 34; Sommer (2005) 297.

Roman Mesopotamia, including not just parts of northern Mesopotamia, but Adiabene and Babylonia. As the region containing the major zone of contact between the Roman and Sasanid Empires, it is appropriate that the description of Assyria is the largest and most detailed part of Ammianus' Persian geography.¹³⁰

Ammianus' use of "Assyria" to refer to a wide swathe of the Fertile Crescent is reminiscent of Strabo's understanding of the term. The important difference between the two is that Strabo includes Roman Syria within Assyrian lands, whereas Ammianus only includes non-Roman lands. However, there may be a hint of Strabo's use in Ammianus' initial description:

The nearest to us of all the provinces is Assyria, famous for its large population, its size, and the great wealth and fruitfulness of its many products. This province once spread over great and prosperous peoples and districts, it submitted to a single name, and now the entire region is called Assyria. There among a great abundance of berries and common fruits, bitumen is found near the lake called Sosingites, in whose bed the Tigris is swallowed up, and then, after flowing underground, emerges after traversing a long distance.¹³¹

The contrast Ammianus draws between the region once having been spread through many people and districts (*quondam per populos pagosque amplos diffusa*) and now being united under the single name of "Assyria" (*ad unum concessit vocabulum et nunc omnis appellatur Assyria*) is primarily a contrast between a space inhabited by diverse populations that has become a unified space under a single name, but the use of *diffusa per* and *concedo* hints at a wider scope (such as the "Assyrian" space described by Strabo) that has been constricted in a smaller space (as Ammianus describes).

Within his description of Assyria, Ammianus gives a brief description of Adiabene and names several cities in southern Mesopotamia.¹³² The short list of

¹³⁰ Amm. Marc. 23.6.15–25. Boeft et al. (1998) 147 suggest that the narrative weight accorded to Assyria was due to Ammianus' familiarity with the region, its importance as the scene of Julian's campaign, and the brief conquest of Assyria by Trajan.

¹³¹ Amm. Marc. 23.6.15: "Citra omnes provincias est nobilis Assyria celebritate et magnitudine et multiformi feracitate ditissima. quae per populos pagosque amplos diffusa quondam et copiosa, ad unum concessit vocabulum et nunc omnis appellatur Assyria, ubi inter bacarum vulgariumque abundantiam frugum bitumen nascitur prope lacum nomine Sosingiten, cuius alveo Tigris voratus fluensque subterraneus percursis spatiis longis emergit." Boeft et al. (1998) 147–48.

¹³² Adiabene: 23.6.20–21; Boeft et al. (1998) 152–53. Southern Mesopotamian cities: 23.6.23; Boeft et al. (1998) 155–58. Both passages are discussed in Chapter 4.

Assyrian cities is followed by a more expansive list of the three most illustrious cities in the region (Babylon, Ctesiphon and Seleucia) all which were unambiguously within Persian territory.¹³³ Seleucia on the Tigris and Ctesiphon were regularly the target of Roman raids down the Tigris or Euphrates, but even when the Roman conquerors attempted to hold them, their possession was never lasting. As well as the Tigris and other rivers mentioned in his description of Adiabene, Ammianus lists three rivers in Assyria: the Marses, the *flumen regium*, and the Euphrates; the first two names probably refer to the same river, the Naarmalcha Canal.¹³⁴

Ammianus' description of Assyria establishes the general location of the region by describing its contents and establishes its topological relationship to the adjacent provinces and regions, but it does not topographically locate its boundaries. This can be established to a certain degree by Ammianus' account of Julian's expedition in 363 CE, within which the description of Persian regions is situated. In fact, the location of this excursus is one indication of part of the boundary between Roman and Persian space.

5.3 *Julian's Geography*

Ammianus' account of Julian's campaign traces the entire route in some geographical and historical detail from the army's departure from Antioch under Julian in 363 CE to its return to Nisibis under Jovian in 364 CE. Ammianus begins to give geographical details when the route moves between Hierapolis in Euphratensis and Batnae in Osrhoene (or as Ammianus calls it, Osdroene).

¹³³ Amm. Marc. 23.6.23: "splendidissimae vero et pervulgatae hae solae sunt tres: Babylon cuius moenia bitumine Samiramis struxit – arcem enim antiquissimus rex condidit Belus – et Ctesiphon quam Vardanes temporibus priscis instituit, posteaque rex Pacorus incolarum viribus amplificatam et moenibus Graeco indito nomine, Persidis effecit specimen summum. post hanc Seleucia ambitiosum opus Nicatoris Seleuci." (But these three alone are the most illustrious and populous: Babylon, whose walls Semiramis built with bitumen (for the ancient king Belus built the citadel), and Ctesiphon, which Vardanes founded long ago; and later king Pacorus strengthened it with additional inhabitants and with walls, gave it a Greek name, and made it the crowning glory of Persia. And after this is Seleucia, the ostentatious work of Seleucus Nicator.).

¹³⁴ Amm. Marc. 23.6.25: "Perfluunt autem has easdem terras potiores ante alios amnes hi, quos praediximus, et Marses et Flumen regium et Euphrates cunctis excellens. qui triperitus navigabilis per omnes est rivos, insulasque circumfluens, et arva cultorum industria diligentius rigans vomeri et gignendis arbustis habilia facit." (But more important than others are these rivers already mentioned flowing through these same lands: the Marses, the Royal River and, greatest of all, the Euphrates, which divides in three, all entirely navigable, flows around islands and attentively watering the fields through the diligence of the farmers makes them ready for the plough and for bearing fruit trees.) Boeft et al. (1998) 161–62.

Accordingly, it gives some sense of the Roman provinces across the Euphrates as well as showing the boundary between Roman and Persian space. Beyond Heirapolis, Ammianus refers to a number of locations in Roman space: Batnae, Carrhae, Davae, the Balikh River, Callinicum, Cercesium, and the Khabur River. After Julian crosses into “Assyria”, Ammianus informs us about a second set of locations along the Euphrates and in Babylonia: Zaitha, Dura Europus, Anatha, Thilutha, Achaiachala, Baraxmalcha, Diacira, Macepracta, the Naarmalcha Canal, Pirisabora, Maozamalcha, Coche/Seleucia, and Ctesiphon. The narrative of the retreat from Ctesiphon includes a final set of locations: the districts of Hucumbra and Maranga, then, after Julian’s death, the toponyms Sumere, Charcham, Dura on the Tigris, Hatra, Ur, Thilsaphata and Nisibis.

The boundary between Roman and Persian space on the Euphrates is clearly marked. When the narrative reaches Circesium, Ammianus notes:

The Emperor marched to Circesium, a very secure and skilfully built fortification. The Khabur and Euphrates Rivers flow around the walls making a sort of island. [2] The place was small and of dubious strength before Diocletian surrounded it with high walls and towers, when he was arranging the interior of the frontier regions at the very edges of the Barbarian territory, so that the Persians might not wander through Syria as had happened a few years earlier with great damage to the provinces.¹³⁵

This strong Diocletianic fortification (*munimentum tutissimum et fabre politum*) lay at the confluence of the Khabur and the Euphrates and marked the edge of Roman space. Ammianus clearly marks the Khabur as the boundary of Roman space in his narrative. After crossing the Khabur, Julian addressed his troops then sets foot into Assyria at dawn the next morning (“candente iam luce Assyrios fines ingressus”).¹³⁶ Between the speech and the dramatic start to the invasion proper, Ammianus inserts his lengthy survey of the Persian Empire, discussed above. Sundwall claims that this digression “ill-fits the immediate context of the chapter”;¹³⁷ on the contrary, the digression fits the narrative perfectly and signals the crossing from Roman to Persian space. Such a

¹³⁵ Amm. Marc. 23.5.1–2: “[Imperator Cercesium] ingressus est munimentum tutissimum et fabre politum. cuius moenia Abora et Euphrates ambiunt flumina velut spatium insulare fingentes. [2] quod Diocletianus exiguum antehac et suspectum muris turribusque circumdedit celsis, cum in ipsis barbarorum confiniis interiores limites ordinaret, ne vagarentur per Syriam Persae ita ut paucis ante annis cum magnis provinciarum contigerat damnis.” On Circesium and this passage, see Boeft et al. (1998) 82–84.

¹³⁶ Julian’s speech: Amm. Marc. 23.5.16–25. Entry to Assyria: 24.1.1.

¹³⁷ Sundwall (1996) 624.

lengthy digression was necessary for Ammianus to clearly signal this boundary because he had already begun to describe Julian's journey into Assyria earlier in book 23.

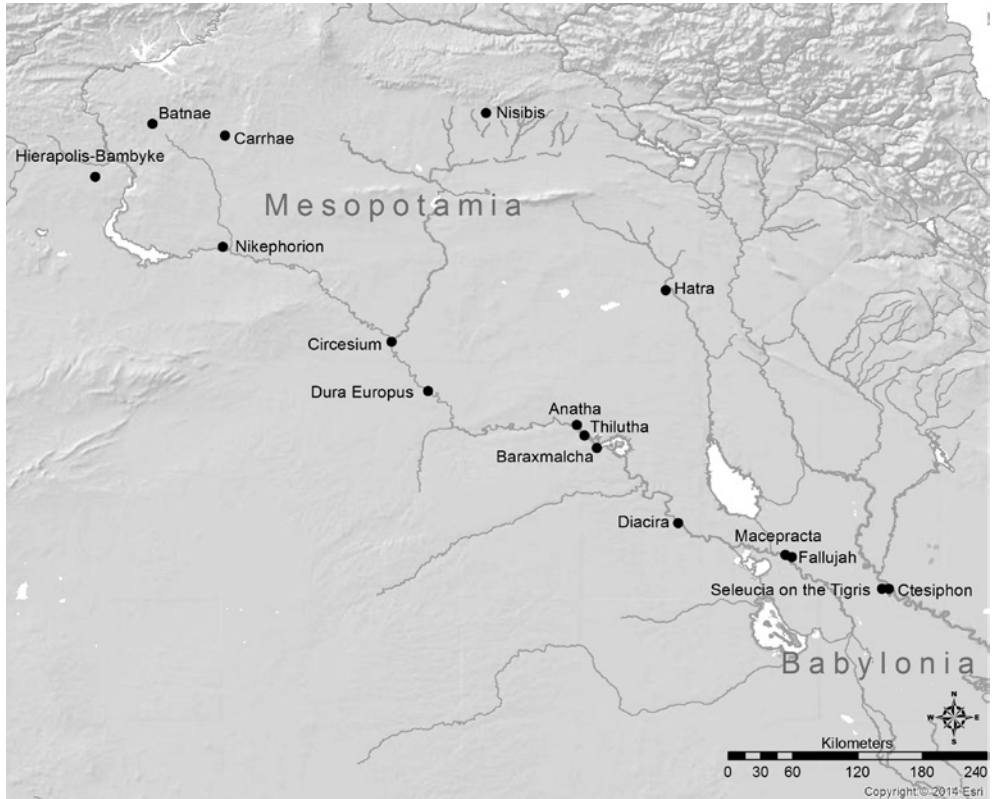
Ammianus' work in general is filled with references to omens, magical practices and religious rituals. He is particularly interested in predictions of imperial deaths and his account of Julian's march into Assyria abounds with ill omens. When Julian reaches Circesium, Ammianus describes an omen there then immediately continues his description of the journey downstream. The narrative describes the journey to Zaitha, where Julian sacrifices at the site of Gordian's death, then on to Dura Europus, where Julian receives another omen in the form of a dead lion, before finishing with several more omens as the journey continues.¹³⁸ Of note here are that Zaitha and Dura Europus lie south of the Khabur in Assyria, so Ammianus' narrative has entered Persian territory and burned the bridge over the Khabur behind it. After the last omen in this set, Ammianus' narrative returns to the bridge at Circesium, has Julian give his speech, gives his Persian geographical survey, and has Julian officially enter Assyria (again) at dawn. By doubling the crossing of the Khabur for emphasis in this way, Ammianus clearly marks the boundary between Roman and Sasanian space before proceeding to repeat the army's arrival at Dura Europus at the start of book 24, this time in the correct place.¹³⁹

The second group of locations are those which Ammianus locates in Assyria. Most of these are clearly marked as belonging to the Sasanid sphere, either directly by Ammianus' text or indirectly by the actions of the Roman army towards them. Ammianus describes Zaitha simply as a place (*locus*); its location is unknown.¹⁴⁰ The only feature Ammianus records at the site is the tomb of Gordian (*Gordiani imperatoris ... tumulum*), perhaps indicating that

138 Amm. Marc. 23.5.4–14. The relevant sections of Boeft et al. (1998) (pp. 90–109) contain many notes on the subject, as well as references to omens elsewhere in Ammianus.

139 Amm. Marc. 24.1.5; Matthews (1989) 130–31, 178–79. Scholars have attributed this doubling to error or a lack of clarity on the part of Ammianus, but it is better considered as a deliberate move to emphasise the importance of the border crossing. Chalmers (1959) resists the suggestion that Ammianus' repetition of Dura was a result of his careless use of sources, preferring to see the first instance as reflecting a small scouting group heading in the direction of Dura (*ad Dura*); Boeft et al. (1998) 100 agrees. Fornara (1985) argues that Julian's address to the army took place after the army had advanced some distance into Persian territory, that is, exactly where Ammianus departs from his narrative to describe Persia.

140 Amm. Marc. 23.5.7. Gawlikowski (2007) 132–34; Boeft et al. (1998) 97. Ptolemy (*Geog.* 5.18.6) lists “Ζεῖθα (ἢ Ζήθα)” as one of the “cities or villages of Mesopotamia near the Euphrates” (“Πόλεις δὲ εἰσιν ἐν τῇ Μεσοποταμίᾳ καὶ κῶμαι, παρὰ μὲν τὸν Εὐφράτην ποταμὸν αἴδε...”).



MAP 3.6 Known sites from Julian's campaign

by Ammianus' time the site was only a village, if it remained occupied at all.¹⁴¹ Dura Europus appears as a deserted site, either a town or city (*Duram desertum oppidum* and *civitatem ... Duram desertam*), on the bank of the Euphrates (*marginibus amnis inpositam*).¹⁴² The first inhabited site encountered after crossing the Khabur is Anatha.¹⁴³ Julian sends a force to capture it, but even

¹⁴¹ Musil (1927) 337–39; Chaumont (1984) 89; Boeft et al. (1998) 97–98.

¹⁴² Amm. Marc. 23.5.8; 24.1.5. Boeft et al. (1998) 100–101.

¹⁴³ Anatha was an island fortress four days from Dura; Amm. Marc. 24.1.6: “Anathan munimentum ... quod ut pleraque alia circumluitur fluentis Euphratis” (the fortification of Anatha ... which, like many others, is surrounded by the stream of the Euphrates.) Musil (1927) 345–49; Gawlikowski (1988) 90; Ibrahim (1986) 80; Boeft et al. (2003) 14–15. Isidore calls the same place Anatho and places it twenty-seven *schoinoi* along the route. Anatha (also known as Ana) was held by Rome in the third century CE and probably by the Palmyrenes as early as the first. Since 1985, the ancient site now lies beneath the waters of the northern end of the Haditha reservoir in Iraq near the relocated modern town, Anah.

after the inhabitants agree to terms, the Romans burn the town.¹⁴⁴ This is clearly non-Roman territory. Thereafter, Ammianus describes a series of hostile encounters with fortresses and cities along the route (Thilutha,¹⁴⁵ Achaiachala,¹⁴⁶ Baraxmalcha,¹⁴⁷ Diacira¹⁴⁸) until they reach the heart of Sasanian Babylonia

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- 144 Amm. Marc. 24.1.6–9. Musil interprets the surrender of the fort, the rewarding of the commander and the deportation of the population to Calchis as evidence of collusion between the inhabitants and the Romans, Musil (1927) 238. However, that seems to ignore the possibility of forced relocation. Boeft et al. (2003) 18–19.
- 145 Thilutha is Telbis Island: Amm. Marc. 24.2.1: “... castra pervenimus nomine Thilutha in medio fluminis sita, locum inmenso quodam vertice tumescentem et potestate naturae velut manu circumsaeptum humana ...” (We came to a fortress by the name of Thilutha situated in the middle of the river, a place rising up to a high summit and surrounded with the power of nature as if by a human hand ...); Isidore 1: “μεθ’ ἣν Θιλαβούς νῆσος κατὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην, ἔνθα γὰρ Πάρθων, σχοῖνοι β̄.” (After which is Thilabous, an island in the Euphrates, where there is a treasury of the Parthians, two *schoinoi*.) Chaumont (1984) 97; Gawlikowski (1988) 85, 90; Boeft et al. (2003) 30. On Telbis island, now inundated by the waters of the Haditha Dam: Musil (1927) 239. A brief description of the rescue excavations can be found in Killick and Roaf (1983) 222. Of note is evidence of Parthian occupation but “as yet no sign of the royal treasure mentioned by Isidore of Charax”. Captain Chesney’s Euphrates expedition of 1831 reported seeing “the still perfect walls of ancient Tilbus” on the island, quoted in Matthews (1989) 146. Guest (1992) offers an engaging account of Chesney’s ill-fated attempt to prove the utility of the Euphrates for delivery of mail between the UK and British India.
- 146 Achaiachala: Amm. Marc. 24.2.2: “quo transito cum ad munimentum aliud Achaiachalam nomine venissemus fluminis circumitione vallatum arduumque transcensu, refutati pari responso discessimus. alia postridie castra ob muros invalidos derelicta praetereuntur incensa.” (After passing that place, when we came to another fortress named Achaiachala, fortified by the surrounding river and difficult to ascend, rebuffed in the same way, we departed. The next day a fortress abandoned because of its crumbling walls was burned in passing.) Musil (1927) 239 identifies Achaiachala with the town of al-Hadita, Gawlikowski (1988) 90 prefers Bidjân.
- 147 Baraxmalcha is probably to be identified with Bidjân Island and Isidore’s Izan (“Ἰζαν): Amm. Marc. 24.2.3. Isidore 1: “εἴτα Ἰζαν νησόπολις, σχοῖνοι ιβ̄. εἴτα Ἀείπολις, ἔνθα ἀσφαλτίτιδες πηγαί, σχοῖνοι ις̄.” (Then Izan, an island city, 12 *schoinoi*, then Aipolis, where there are springs of asphalt, 16 *schoinoi*.) Bidjân Island is another site flooded by the Haditha Dam. It was occupied by Parthians (perhaps Palmyrenes) and Romans sequentially until the mid-third century CE. Edwell (2008) 73–74; Killick and Roaf (1983) 208; Chaumont (1984) 97–98; Gawlikowski (1988) 85; Ibrahim (1986) 79; Boeft et al. (2003) 33–34.
- 148 Diacira is Hit; the Assyrian name for the place, Id, is derived from the word for pitch, and the Aramaic name, Ihi Dikira, means ‘place of asphalt’: Musil (1927) 239, 350–53; Matthews (1989) 147–48; Boeft et al. (2003) 34. Isidore gives Diacira/Hit the name Aipolis, notes the bitumen springs, and places it sixteen *schoinoi* beyond Izan: Chaumont (1984) 98–99; Gawlikowski (1988) 85, 90. This part of Babylonia was renowned for its bitumen springs; both Strabo (16.1.15) and Ammianus (23.6.16) describe the production and qualities of naphtha in southern Mesopotamia.

in the vicinity of the city of Macepracta near the inflow of the Naarmalcha Canal.¹⁴⁹

The return of the Roman army by a different route, towards Nisibis, allows us to investigate the border between Roman Mesopotamia and Sasanian Assyria in another location. After breaking off the invasion, the Roman force proceeds up the Tigris towards Corduene (Gordyene).¹⁵⁰ The army passed the city of Dura on the Tigris (“*civitatem nomine Duram*”) before crossing that river and reaching the abandoned ruins of Hatra.¹⁵¹

We arrived near Hatra, an old town situated in the middle of a desert, and long since abandoned. The warlike emperors Trajan and Severus attempted to destroy it with their armies on various occasions and were almost destroyed themselves, as I described in my accounts of their reigns.¹⁵²

149 Macepracta: Amm. Marc. 24.2.6: “animatus his vincendi primitiis miles ad vicum Macepracta pervenit, in quo semiruta murorum vestigia videbantur, qui priscis temporibus in spatia longa protenti tueri ab externis incursibus Assyriam dicebantur.” (Excited by the first fruits of victory, the soldiers reached the village of Macepracta, in which they saw the remains of half-ruined walls. There are those who say that in ancient times they extended for a long distance and protected Assyria from foreign attacks.) This is probably the *vicum Massicen* mentioned by Pliny (*NH* 5.90). Isidore calls the town Besechana and locates it twelve *schoinoi* after Diacira/Hīt/Aipolis, Isidore 1 “ἐνθεν Βεσηχάνα πόλις, ἐν ἧι ἱερὸν Ἀτάργατι, σχοῖνοι ἰβ.” (Then the city of Besechana in which there is a temple to Atargatis, 12 *schoinoi*.) For the identification of Besechana as Massicen, Chaumont (1984) 99; Gawlikowski (1988) 86. Strabo transmits the name in abbreviated form as “Skenai” (16.1.27). The region of this settlement was also the site of Shapur’s famous victory over Gordian in 244 CE (Dillemann (1961) 154; Paschoud (1978) 348), so this site may also be the same as Misiche which Shapur claims to have renamed Peroz-Shapur in his commemorative inscription at Naqš-e Rostam (ŠKZ (*Res Gestae Divi Saporis*) 4–5, 9–10; Greek text with French translation: Maricq (1958). Gawlikowski (2007) 131.) However, Ammianus records the nearby city of Ambarra (Anbar) as bearing that name, Pirisabora (Amm. Marc. 24.2.9; Zosimus (3.17.3) gives Βηρσαβώρα; Oelsner, Joachim, ‘Ambarra’ BNP; Matthews (1989) 132, 149, 174–75; Musil (1927) 353–57; Boeft et al. (2003) 48–49). Shapur may have relocated the people of Misiche to the more defensible site of his “new” city Peroz-Shapur, or it may have simply been a refoundation by which Shapur attached a new dynastic name to an existing city.

150 Ammianus attributes the choice of route to the will of the gods, as established by traditional Roman sacrificial practice: Amm. Marc. 24.8.4–5.

151 The army passes a village (*villam*) named Hucumbra (Amm. Marc. 25.1.4; Boeft et al. (2005) 10–11), an area (*tractum*) named Maranga (Amm. Marc. 25.1.10–11; Boeft et al. (2005) 21), then, after Julian’s death (Amm. Marc. 25.3), a fortress (*castellum*) named Sumere (Amm. Marc. 25.6.4; Boeft et al. (2005) 203), a place (*locus*) called Charcha (Amm. Marc. 25.6.8; Boeft et al. (2005) 209), then Dura on the Tigris (Amm. Marc. 25.6.9; Boeft et al. (2005) 210).

152 Amm. Marc. 25.8.5: “... prope Hatram venimus, vetus oppidum in media solitudine positum, olimque desertum, quod eruendum adorti temporibus variis Traianus et Severus

This is one of the few literary accounts of Hatra which, like Dura Europus, had been deserted for over a century before Ammianus' arrival.¹⁵³ After at least six days and seventy miles, Jovian's army reached a Persian fortress called Ur ("Ur nomine Persicum ... castellum") where they were met by a Roman tribune sent with supplies from the Roman forces in Mesopotamia.¹⁵⁴ Dillemann suggests this may have been Zagura, perhaps Orurus, the border of the empire in Pompey's day according to Pliny.¹⁵⁵ Ammianus describes Ur as a Persian fortress, which he probably meant in historical rather than political terms. In other words, it was *Persicum* in that it had been built by the Persians, not *Persicum* in that the Persians currently controlled it. There is no mention of a sizeable military force which might be expected to accompany a supply train to a meeting in the shadow of an enemy fort. The Roman army had been harried by Persian forces even after the peace treaty was signed on the Tigris, but Ammianus does not relate any conflicts in the desert and there is no reference to fighting, hostilities or even wariness at Ur. The peaceful encounter there with the supply train probably indicates that this was formerly a Persian fortress, which at this time lay under Roman control; it may have been one of the fifteen forts that Jovian had agreed to hand over to the Persians in his treaty.¹⁵⁶ Closer to Nisibis, Ammianus mentions a place called Thilsaphata, but without clarifying what kind of place it is.¹⁵⁷ Dillemann identifies Thilsaphata with Pliny's Thebata, but neither site has been identified archaeologically.¹⁵⁸ The final acts of the campaign take place at Nisibis, but Ammianus gives no geographical information about the city.¹⁵⁹ Nisibis was certainly part of the Roman province of Mesopotamia at this time, and the Roman forces charged with defending Mesopotamia met the retreating army at Thilsaphata, so it too was probably within their jurisdiction. The desert region between the Tigris and Ur probably formed the boundary between Roman and Persian territory in this area.

principes bellicosi cum exercitibus paene deleti sunt, ut in eorum actibus has quoque digessimus partes." Trajan's attempt is described by Dio Cassius (68.31).

153 Hauser, Stefan R., 'Hatra' *BNP*; 'Hatra' *PECS*, pp. 379–80; Dirven (2013); Sommer (2005) 355–90; Hauser (1998); Drijvers (1978); Boeft et al. (2005) 258–60. In particular, Sommer describes the political status of Hatra in the borderland and Dirven's edited volume describes the current state of research on the site. Isaac (2013) (in that volume) collects the literary sources for Hatra.

154 Amm. Marc. 25.8.6–7.

155 Dillemann (1962) 311; other suggestions are discussed by Boeft et al. (2005) 262–63. Pliny, *NH* 6.120.

156 Amm. Marc. 25.7.9.

157 Amm. Marc. 25.8.16.

158 Dillemann (1962) 311–12; Boeft et al. (2005) 274. See Chapter 4.

159 Amm. Marc. 25.8.17; 25.9.8. Boeft et al. (2005) 275.

Ammianus gives no indication that there was any settled activity in this space that would have required a more precise division of space.

Although Ammianus does not describe the space he calls “Mesopotamia” directly, we can observe much about his understanding of the term through the allusions he makes to it. When discussing Roman space, he places the term in lists of administrative categories, the same framework by which he divides Persian space. Moreover, his descriptions of spaces at a regional scale are largely based on topological relationships to other administrative units. The Euphrates acts as a border between Syria and Osdroena, but the Tigris is internal to the Persian administrative region of Assyria. We again have cause to lament the loss of his geographical description of Mesopotamia and the knowledge of whether he treated the area so denominated as a geographical or political space. As it stands, Ammianus’ Mesopotamia is a Roman administrative space, delimited by the Roman provinces which surround it, and by the Persian region of Assyria (including Adiabene). At the Euphrates, the boundary between Mesopotamia and Assyria lay at the Khabur River, while to the north, the boundary lay in the desert between Ur and the Tigris.

6 Labels and Limits

In exploring the various meanings of “Mesopotamia” in Roman imperial geographic writing, this chapter has been primarily concerned with the representation of geographical boundaries, that is, fixed boundaries defined by geographical features. However, while all of the works discussed above include geographical descriptions of the Mesopotamian Borderland, they do not all take a perspective on boundaries and the delimitation and denomination of space that we might consider primarily geographical in this sense. Strabo’s approach is primarily geographical. He names Mesopotamia from its position between the Euphrates and Tigris and delimits the region according to those rivers, the Taurus, and the desert which separates Mesopotamia and Babylonia. Pliny’s narrative takes the geography of the region into consideration, but is primarily structured according to broader political concerns.¹⁶⁰ Like Strabo, he names the region for the rivers and uses those as the major delimitations for the space. Pliny does not specifically make the Taurus the northern boundary of Mesopotamia, but the places and people he locates within the region imply that his conception of its northern limit also falls along that range. To

¹⁶⁰ For the way these political concerns are reflected in Pliny’s representation of Mesopotamia, see Chapter 7.

the south, Pliny is particularly vague. Pliny's approach to internal divisions differs between the two books in which he treats the region. Ptolemy's account is also primarily geographical, but in a different way to that of Strabo. His work does not elaborate on the etymological details of the places he describes, but the boundaries he assigns to Mesopotamia show that the standard denomination according to the two rivers applies here also. Those two rivers form the usual boundaries, while he specifies the southern boundary according to a third, the Naarmalcha Canal, which links the Euphrates to the Tigris in northern Babylonia. In the north, the Taurus is the boundary between Mesopotamia and Armenia as usual. The *Expositio Totius Mundi* names the region using administrative categories (Mesopotamia and Osdroena), but treats them as a group implicitly governed by the geographical boundaries of the two rivers. Ammianus is aware of the geographical extent of the areas he describes, but those areas are defined according to the administrative categories of the political entities which control them.

While the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers are most commonly used to define the geographical space of Mesopotamia, the northern and southern edges are more nebulous. To the north, the boundary was marked consistently by the Taurus. However, while a river comprises a relatively consistent and narrowly defined line, mountains are much more difficult. In his account of the history of the Pyrenees as a boundary between France and Spain in the early modern period, Peter Sahlins shows how the existence and status of mountain valleys complicates state attempts to define precise boundaries of control in mountainous areas.¹⁶¹ Syme considered the northern plateau between the Tur Abdin/Masius and the Taurus range proper (that is, the upper Tigris basin) to be part of Armenia, but Strabo considered it part of Mesopotamia. For Strabo, it is that latter range that divides Mesopotamia from Armenia, not the Tigris. The upper Tigris valley, and the Gordyaeen Mountains (including Tur Abdin/Masius) comprise Strabo's Gordyene. Strabo is not bound by the strict divisions implied by the etymology of the word "Mesopotamia". In his account of the political allegiances of the Mesopotamian Skenitai, he discusses peoples both north and south of the Euphrates.¹⁶² Strabo's Mesopotamia includes both the southern slopes of the Taurus north of the Tigris and the steppe and desert regions on the south side of the Euphrates. Pliny is not specific about the northern boundary, but in book 6 he shows a similar approach to Strabo when he describes mountain tribes in Gordyene and Adiabene along with the tribes of the fertile and desert regions to the south. Ptolemy attempts to define

¹⁶¹ Sahlins (1989).

¹⁶² Strabo 16.1.28. Chapter 5.

Mesopotamia with the greatest precision; the boundaries between his regions always include coordinate locations. Accordingly, he gives precise coordinates for the places where the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers intersect that imaginary line of the Taurus on their journey downstream from Armenia sources. His conception of Mesopotamia's borders is the strictest.

The southern boundary, that between Mesopotamia and Babylonia, is even more unclear. Ptolemy is again precise, giving coordinates locating the Naarmalcha Canal as the boundary. However, this is further south than previous writers. Ptolemy is alone in locating Seleucia on the Tigris within Mesopotamia rather than in Babylonia where it is usually placed. Ptolemy's desire for geographical precision led him to use bodies of water to divide space whenever possible, at the expense of other methods of aggregating space. The more common distinction between Mesopotamia and Babylonia probably stems from farming method, although this is not noted explicitly. The northern regions (Mesopotamia) are characterised by dryland farming in which the fields are watered primarily by rain, while in the south (Babylonia), an ancient system of canal-based irrigation provides the bulk of the agricultural water. Seleucia falls within the irrigated zone and, along with Ctesiphon across the Tigris, is usually described as the most important city in Parthian Babylonia.¹⁶³ Strabo does not give a precise division, although he does conform to the agricultural distinction just proposed. He includes the steppe pastoralists and communities along the Euphrates strip in Mesopotamia and the irrigated lands to the south, including Seleucia and Ctesiphon, in Babylonia. Pliny is even less precise. Although he shows more knowledge of the various tribes that inhabit Mesopotamia, broadly defined to include mountain tribes of the Taurus and Zagros and perhaps Skenitai near Mesene, his descriptions of Mesopotamia, Adiabene, Babylonia and the regions to the south blend seamlessly together without delimitation. He knows of and names the Naarmalcha Canal, but does not attribute it any conceptual status as a boundary as Ptolemy did.

The geographical space between the Euphrates and Tigris was certainly considered a distinct geophysical region by the geographical writers of the Roman Empire and distinguished from the more intensively developed southern region of Babylonia. In those cases (Pliny and Ammianus) where the distinction between the geographical region which the Roman writers called Mesopotamia and that which they called Babylonia was relatively weak, political concerns are clear in their presentation. In the case of Ammianus, his main method of denominating and delimiting space was according to political and

163 Ptolemy places Ctesiphon (on the east side of the Tigris) in Assyria rather than Babylonia, *Geog.* 6.1.3.

administrative boundaries and categories (the Roman provinces of Osdroena and Mesopotamia and the Persian region of Assyria). Pliny's political treatment of the Mesopotamian Borderland is more complex and will be discussed in Chapter 7.

While the features of physical geography govern much of how "Mesopotamia" is conceived in Roman imperial geographical texts, the Mesopotamias described within those texts derived shape and texture from characteristics other than terrain. Political and administrative concerns are evident in the spaces revealed in these narratives. Pliny's *praefectura Mesopotamiae* seems to reflect his understanding of a Parthian or Assyrian categorisation. After the third century establishment of an official Roman administrative category (a *provincia*) called *Mesopotamia*, the name came to signify a more restricted area. The *Expositio Totius Mundi* eschewed geographical delimitation for political, administrative and ethnographic categories, while Ammianus used the term "Mesopotamia" to refer to the province rather than the geographical space to which Strabo referred. In addition to overt contemporary and historical political arrangements, inherited systems of knowledge, categorisation, delimitation and denomination helped shape the understanding of the space. The most obvious is the name "Mesopotamia" itself, which derives from the Greek description of the space "between the rivers". Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy all retained this name for the geographical region between the Taurus and Babylonia. Ptolemy attempted to apply over the world a mathematical categorisation of space developed by Hellenistic scientists, and early expressions of Hellenistic scientific geography can be seen in the works of Strabo and Pliny, as we saw in Chapter 2. Other Hellenistic systems of organising and describing the world are evident in these narratives. Where narrative geography is less open to the influence of scientific methods of conception and description, it is more open to systems of categorisation and expression that inscribe imperialistic perspectives of geographical space. Perspectives that privilege imperial influence and control in the region become clearer as we look closer.

Narrating

The previous chapter examined the Mesopotamian Borderland from a macro-perspective, interrogating the sources for insight into how “Mesopotamia” was constructed as a unitary space, how the areas denominated by that word were constructed in relation to neighbouring geographical and political spaces, and how those areas fit in relation to the Mesopotamian Borderland as a whole. In this chapter, we zoom in from that broad perspective to examine the spaces that comprised the borderland, both within “Mesopotamia” (however it was more narrowly defined) and in the region more generally. Here, the overall frame is the Mesopotamian Borderland.

In their narratives, Roman imperial geographic writers use a variety of methods of spatial description to convey their conception of the Mesopotamian Borderland. These methods include the linguistic and narrative selection of material used to populate the region, the arrangement of that material into certain configurations to construct a representation of the space as they imagined it, the creation or representation of certain internal boundaries to shape space into a narrative, and the use of certain categories and sub-categories to present an organisation of both their region and the text. Two threads of particular importance in this chapter are the role of historical and contemporary imperial narratives and the question of the dimensionality of ancient spatial conceptions.

The subjectivity of these narrative techniques is particularly evident when considering the role of Hellenistic colonial narratives in the text. These narratives shaped the geographical texts of the early Roman Empire to a considerable degree. Strabo’s *Geography*, Pliny’s *Natural History* and Ptolemy’s *Geography* are our three most complete sources for the Mesopotamian Borderland. Although all three works incorporated material from the Roman period, they all drew extensively on the tradition of Hellenistic geographic knowledge for the raw geographical material they used to describe northern Mesopotamia. None of them attempted to create an entirely new body of material derived primarily from Roman exploration, military activity, or administrative records. Other local and foreign sources of knowledge can be occasionally seen in these texts, but these are largely transmitted through, subsumed within, and appropriated by the Hellenistic intellectual project.¹ Thus, the adoption, whether conscious

1 As we will see in Chapter 7, Strabo makes different use of that Assyrian past, but he highlights the Macedonians influence on the landscape of Assyria by frequent reference to Alexander.

or not, of Hellenistic colonial narratives in Roman geographical writing played an important role in shaping the Roman imperial narrative they produced.

I have already stressed the distinction between planar and linear geography.² The role of linear descriptive techniques in Classical thought has been recognised and examined considerably over the past 30 years.³ However, we should remember that space can be imagined in a variety of ways. Roman imperial geographic writers conceived of and described space in both two-dimensional and one-dimensional ways. Descriptive geographers like Strabo provide ample evidence for the ability of Romans to conceive of space in two-dimensional terms. Moreover, travel based on itineraries is still a major form of spatial engagement in the 21st century. The relationship between itineraries and two-dimensional conceptions of space can be easily imagined in a modern context by considering the linear nature of the directions given by an online mapping and navigation service such as Google Maps. Two-dimensional maps and linear directions for travel are not incompatible technologies. Different modes of conceiving of travel, routes and directions apply in different situations depending on the depth of the traveller's knowledge of the route and the area. To some degree, the physical nature of a written text encourages a list-like structure, but it is possible for an author to transcend the physical restrictions of the medium to give a sense of space through descriptive use of spatial and topological language. The existence of both two-dimensional topologies and linear segments of *periploi* and itineraries can be seen within the broader narrative structures of Strabo and Pliny, as will be shown below.⁴

1 Strabo

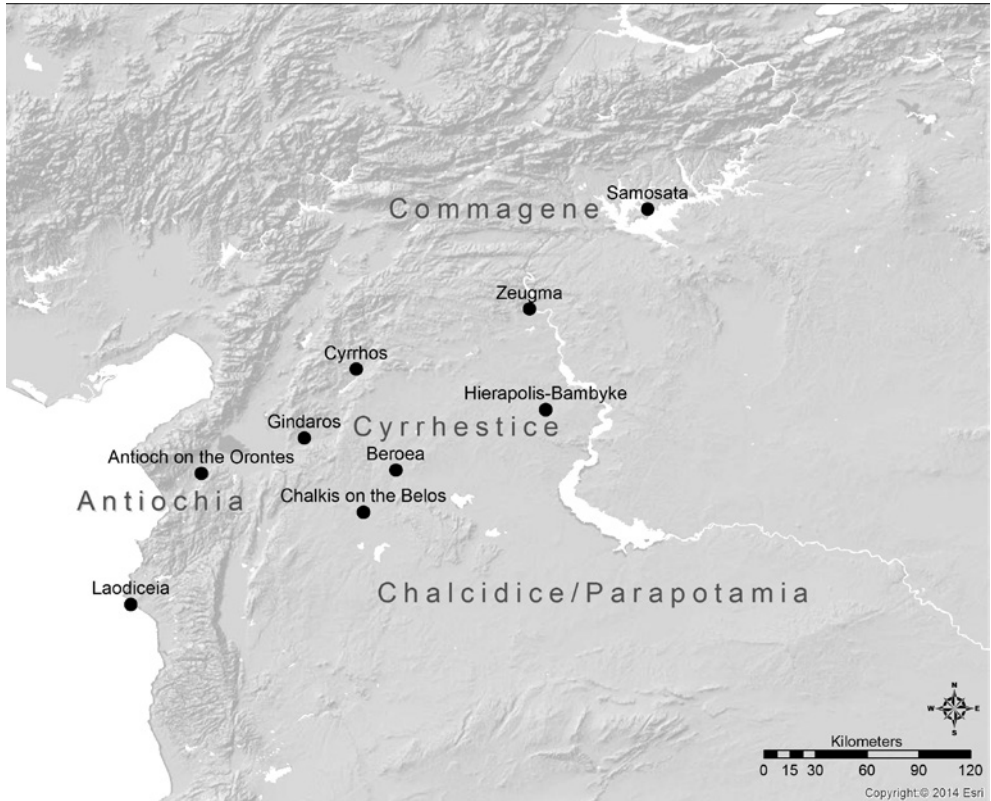
All of Strabo's description of the Mesopotamian Borderland falls within the area he labels as Assyria (οἱ Ἀσσύριοι), as was discussed in the previous chapter. In Strabo's geographical terms, those areas include Commagene, Cyrrhестice, Chalcidice, Mygdonia, Gordyene, and the desert regions of Mesopotamia. In his narrative, these areas are divided between the two geographical regions of Syria and Mesopotamia, divided, as we saw, by the Euphrates River. Strabo's description of Syria begins with a set of boundaries and a geographical context that correspond with the bounds of the Roman province of Strabo's day.⁵ He makes Cilicia and the Amanus range the northern boundaries of Syria, the

² Introduced in Chapter 2, Spatial Measurement.

³ See especially, Janni (1984); Brodersen (1995); Whittaker (2002).

⁴ See also Dueck (2000) 40–43; Nicolet (1991) 173; Romer (1998) 21.

⁵ This is Strabo's usual method when beginning to discuss a new area, Dueck (2000) 167–68.



MAP 4.1 Strabo's Syria

Euphrates and the Arabian Skenitai those of the east, and Arabia Felix and Egypt the south.⁶ Map 4.1 shows the sites named by Strabo in his description of Commagene, Cyrrhестice, Chalcidice and Parapotamia. Parts of his narrative explicitly discuss Roman spatial organisation; other parts describe Syria in terms of Seleucid administrative geography.

6 Strabo 16.2.1: 'Ἡ δὲ Συρία πρὸς ἄρκτον μὲν ἀφώρισται τῇ Κιλικίᾳ καὶ τῷ Ἀμανῷ· ἀπὸ θαλάττης δ' ἐπὶ τὸ ζευγμα τοῦ Εὐφράτου στάδιοι εἰσιν οἱ τὸ λεχθέν πλευρὸν ἀφορί ζοντες οὐκ ἐλάττους τῶν [χιλίων καὶ] τετρακοσίων· πρὸς ἑω δὲ τῷ Εὐφράτῃ καὶ τοῖς ἐντὸς τοῦ Εὐφράτου σκηνίταις Ἀραβί· πρὸς δὲ νότον τῇ εὐδαίμονι Ἀραβίᾳ καὶ τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ· πρὸς δὴ δὲ τῷ Αἰγυπτίῳ τε καὶ Συριακῷ πελάγει μέχρι Ἰσσοῦ. (Syria is bounded on the north by Cilicia and Mt. Amanus; and the distance from the sea to the bridge of the Euphrates, which forms the boundary of that side, is not less than fourteen hundred stadia. It is bounded on the east by the Euphrates and the Arabian Skenitai this side of the Euphrates; and on the south by the Aegyptian and Syrian Seas as far as Issus.) Loeb trans.

1.1 Commagene

In Strabo's time, Commagene was the largest client kingdom in northern Syria and lay in the foothills of the Amanus and Taurus ranges on the west bank of the Euphrates.⁷ In the first century BCE and the first century CE, the political fortunes of the kingdom of Commagene fluctuated with the changing eastern policies of the Roman military dynasts and Emperors who held *imperium* in the Near East.⁸ Strabo's description illustrates this:

In particular, Commagene is small. It has a fortified city, Samosata, in which lay the royal palace, but now it is a province. A small but very fertile land lies around. In this place is now a bridge over the Euphrates [*or Zeugma on the Euphrates*]. Opposite this lies Seleucia, a fortress of Mesopotamia, added to the dominion of Commagene by Pompey, in which Tigranes killed Selene, surnamed Cleopatra, who had been trapped there for some time when she was driven out of Syria.⁹

Strabo includes two notes regarding Roman manipulation of the political geography. The first is that in Strabo's time the kingdom of Commagene had become a province (νῦν δ' ἐπαρχία γέγονε). Potheary has shown that Strabo's use of νῦν and similar expressions is somewhat imprecise and cannot be used to accurately date the events mentioned in his *Geography*;¹⁰ however, in this case, we have the testimony of Tacitus to assist us. Tacitus writes that Germanicus annexed Commagene to Syria in 18 CE after the death of the previous king, Antiochus III Eupator.¹¹ This was not the only time Commagene was transferred to the direct control of the Roman administration, but it was the only

7 Strabo also locates Commagene in his description of the Taurus (11.12.2):...τὸ δὲ Ἀμανὸν ὄρος μέχρι τοῦ Εὐφράτου καὶ τῆς Μελιτηνῆς πρόεισι, καθ' ἣν ἡ Κομμαγενὴ τῇ Καππαδοκίᾳ παράκειται. (... Mount Amanus extends to the Euphrates River and Melitine, where Commagene lies adjacent to Cappadocia.).

8 See Chapter 1.

9 Strabo 16.2.3: "καθ' ἑκαστα δὲ ἡ Κομμαγενὴ μικρά τις ἐστίν· ἔχει δ' ἑρμυρὴν πόλιν Σαμόσατα ἐν ἣ τὸ βασιλεῖον ὑπῆρχε, νῦν δ' ἐπαρχία γέγονε· χώρα δὲ περικείται σφόδρα εὐδαίμων, ὀλίγη [δέ]. Ἐνταῦθα δὲ νῦν ἐστὶ τὸ ζεύγμα τοῦ Εὐφράτου· κατὰ τοῦτο δὲ Σελεύκεια ἱδρύται φρούριον τῆς Μεσοποταμίας προσωρισμένον ὑπὸ Πομπηίου τῷ Κομμαγενῶ, ἐν ᾧ τὴν Σελήνην ἐπικληθεῖσαν Κλεοπάτραν Τιγράνης ἀνείλε, καθεύρξας χρόνον τινὰ ἡνίκα τῆς Συρίας ἐξέπεσεν." Radt (2002) 8.286–288.

10 Potheary (1997).

11 Annexation: Tac. *Ann.* 2.56 (Commagenis Q. Servaeus praepositus, tum primum ad ius praetoris translatus.) Death of Antiochus III Eupator: Tac. *Ann.* 2.42 (per idem tempus Antiocho Commagenorum, Philopatore Cilicum regibus defunctis turbabantur nationes, plerisque Romanum, aliis regium imperium cupientibus.) Radt (2002) 8.286; Millar (1993) 52.

time Strabo could have known about.¹² The second note is that Pompey had adjusted the borders of the kingdom during his eastern settlement; Seleucia was placed within the borders of Commagene by Pompey (Σελεύκεια... προσωρισμένον ὑπὸ Πομπηίου τῷ Κομμαγενῶ). Strabo describes Seleucia as a fortress of Mesopotamia (φρούριον τῆς Μεσοποταμίας) and places it near Zeugma (or near *a Zeugma*: κατὰ τοῦτο i.e. τὸ ζεύγμα τοῦ Εὐφράτου).¹³ In fact, this Seleucia is probably Zeugma itself, which Pliny also knew as Seleucia on the Euphrates (Seleucia ad Euphraten).¹⁴ Pompey's assignment of the fortress to Commagene and Germanicus' annexation of the kingdom indicate the reach of Roman administrative power from the directly controlled core of *provincia Syria*.

The other Commagenean location mentioned by Strabo is Samosata on the west bank of the Euphrates River, now beneath the waters of the Atatürk dam's reservoir.¹⁵ This site was inhabited from pre-historic times and may have been founded as Samosata either by Samos I in the middle of the third century BCE or by Samos II in the second half of the second century BCE.¹⁶ Strabo calls Samosata a *polis* and locates the royal residence there (τὸ βασιλεῖον).¹⁷ Syme disputes the importance Strabo attaches to the site, arguing that Strabo confused Zeugma and Samosata;¹⁸ however, there is ample evidence that Samosata was an important city at a crossing point of the Euphrates.¹⁹ In the

12 Commagene was returned to the nominal control of its royal house by Caligula in 38 CE, only to be annexed a second time by Vespasian in 72 CE. See Chapter 1.

13 Roller (2014) 700 translates the relevant section as "The Euphrates bridge is here now, and Seleukeia is nearby ...".

14 Pliny *NH* 5.82. Cohen (2006) 190–96. Syme (1995) 101 introduces a letter of Cicero of 54 BCE in which the orator claims to have removed Zeugma from Commagene after Pompey's assignment. Cic. *Ad Q. Fr.* 2.10.2–3: "De Commageno, quod rem totam discusseram, mirifice mihi et per se et per Pomponium blanditur Appius; videt enim, hoc genere dicendi si utar in ceteris, Februarium sterilem futurum. Eumque lusi iocose satis, neque solum illud extorsi oppidulum, quod erat positum in Euphrati Zeugmate, sed praeterea togam sum eius praetextam, quam erat adeptus Caesare consule, magno hominum risu cavillatus. 3. "Quod vult," inquam, "renovari honores eosdem, quo minus togam praetextam quotannis interpolet, decernendum nihil censeo; vos autem, homines nobiles, qui Bostrenum praetextatum non ferebatis, Commagenum feretis?" Genus vides et locum iocandi. Multa dixi in ignobilem regem, quibus totus est explosus." For more on Zeugma, see Kennedy (1994); Kennedy (1998a); Abadie-Reynal et al. (1998); Gaborit and Poccardi (2000); Cohen (2006) 190–96.

15 Kennedy (1998b) 17–18.

16 Cohen (2006) 187–89; Sullivan (1977) 751–52.

17 Strabo 16.2.3.

18 Syme (1995) 95–110.

19 Cohen (2006) 188; Comfort et al. (2000) 113. Josephus (*BJ* 7.224) knows Samosata as the main city in Commagene in 72–73 CE and locates it at a crossing on the Euphrates. It also appears as a crossing in the *Antonine Itinerary* (186.5), for which, see Chapter 6.

sentence “ἐνταῦθα δὲ νῦν ἐστὶ τὸ ζεύγμα τοῦ Εὐφράτου· κατὰ τοῦτο δὲ Σελεύκεια ἱδρύεται φρούριον τῆς Μεσοποταμίας...”, Syme takes ἐνταῦθα and κατὰ τοῦτο to refer to Samosata specifically, whereas the subject of the preceding sentence is Commagene as a whole, not its capital specifically. Thus “Seleucia, the fortress of Mesopotamia” need only lie in some relation to Commagene, not to Samosata. Exactly what relation Strabo intends is ambiguous owing to the topological multivalency of κατὰ with the accusative; it can mean opposite (as Syme takes it) or downstream. The latter fits the probable identification of Strabo’s φρούριον τῆς Μεσοποταμίας with Seleucia on the Euphrates, that is, a fortress at the westernmost of the twin towns at Zeugma itself.²⁰ Strabo is guilty of topological vagueness in his placement of the crossing and the fortress, not of confusing Zeugma and Samosata. Nevertheless, Strabo’s inclusion of this fortress of Mesopotamia (the space east of the Euphrates) as a possession of the king of Commagene (in Syria, west of the Euphrates) emphasises that, while the river was a geographical boundary, it need not have been a political barrier.

1.2 *Cyrrhestice*

Strabo divides Syria according to the Seleucid administrative organisation reported by Posidonius (c. 135–51 BCE). The works of this native Syrian from Apamea who travelled widely in the Mediterranean were a major source for Strabo, particularly regarding places in or near Posidonius’ homeland, with which we might expect he was acquainted.²¹ Posidonius reports that Seleucis and Coele Syria were each divided into four satrapies:

Not only is Seleucis the best of the above-mentioned parts [of Syria], but it is also called a tetropolis, and it is, because it has outstanding cities in it. It has several, but the four largest are Antiochia near Daphne, Seleucia in Pieria, Apameia and Laodiceia; and these cities, all founded by Seleucus Nicator, used to be called sisters, because of their concord with one another. The largest is named after his father, most strongly fortified after himself, and the others, Apameia, after his wife Apama, and Laodiceia, after his mother. As appropriate to the Tetropolis, Seleucis was also divided into four satrapies, as Poseidonius says, Coele-Syria into the same number and Mesopotamia into only one.²²

20 Kennedy (1998c) 37; Wagner (1976) esp. 40–51.

21 Inwood, “Poseidonius”, *BNP*. Strabo notes Poseidonius’ Apamean origin in his description of that city (16.2.10). Strabo’s sources are discussed in Chapter 2.

22 Strabo 16.2.4: “Ἡ δὲ Σελευκίς ἀρίστη μὲν ἐστὶ τῶν λεχθεισῶν μερίδων, καλεῖται δὲ τετράπολις καὶ ἔστι κατὰ τὰς ἐξεχούσας ἐν αὐτῇ πόλεις, ἐπεὶ πλείους γέ εἰσι, μέγιστα δὲ τέτταρες, Ἀντιόχεια ἢ ἐπὶ Δάφνῃ καὶ Σελεύκεια ἢ ἐν Πιερίᾳ καὶ Ἀπάμεια δὲ καὶ Λαοδίκεια, αἵπερ καὶ ἐλέγοντο ἀλλήλων

Unfortunately, it is unclear from the administrative organisation Posidonius describes whether Cyrrhestice was a geographical or administrative area. Cohen summarises the debate over the possibilities: 1) Cyrrhestice was a geographical area overlapped by four satrapies corresponding to the four cities of the tetrapolis of Seleucia, one city per satrapy; 2) Cyrrhestice was a separate satrapy from the four satrapies of the tetrapolis; 3) Cyrrhestice was one of the four satrapies of Seleucis along with Chalcidice and two satrapies centred on Antioch and Apameia.²³ Considering the relatively close proximity of the four cities of the Tetrapolis, this last case seems the most sensible from an administrative perspective.²⁴

After Commagene, Strabo describes Antiocheia before directing his attention to the bounds of Cyrrhestice.²⁵ To the north of Cyrrhestice lay Mount Amanus and Commagene, to the south, Chalcidice, to the west, the lands of Antioch and Apamea, and to the east, the Euphrates.²⁶ Within this

ἀδελφαὶ διὰ τὴν ὁμόνοιαν, Σελεύκου τοῦ Νικάτορος κτίσματα· ἡ μὲν οὖν μεγίστη τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ ἐπώνυμος, ἡ δ' ἐρμυνοτάτη αὐτοῦ, αἱ δ' ἄλλαι ἡ μὲν Ἀπάμεια τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ Ἀπάμας, ἡ δὲ Λαοδικαία τῆς μητρὸς. οἰκείως δὲ τῇ τετραπόλει καὶ εἰς σατραπείας διήρητο τέτταρας ἡ Σελευκίς, ὥς φησι Ποσειδώνιος, εἰς ὅσας καὶ ἡ κοίλη Συρία, εἰς μίαν δ' ἡ Μεσοποταμία.” Editors suspect this final clause, Radt (2002) 8.288 (app. crit. at 4.308); Jones (1917) 7.240 n. 3. Roller (2014) 700 accepts the clause in his translation.

23 Cohen (2006) 29.

24 Jones considers this the most likely, Jones (1971) 241–42, n. 21, as does Grainger (1990) 40–41.

25 Strabo 16.2.7: ἀνάπλους δ' ἐκ θαλάττης ἐστὶν εἰς τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν αὐθημερόν. πρὸς ἔω δ' ὁ Εὐφράτης ἐστὶ καὶ ἡ Βαμβύκη καὶ ἡ Βέροια καὶ ἡ Ἡράκλεια τῇ Ἀντιόχειᾳ, πολίχνια τυραννοῦμένα ποτε ὑπὸ Διονυσίου τοῦ Ἡρακλέωνος. διέχει δ' ἡ Ἡράκλεια σταδίου εἴκοσι τοῦ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἱεροῦ τῆς Κυρρηστιδος. (Inland voyages from the sea to Antiocheia are made on the same day one starts. To the East of Antiocheia are the Euphrates, as also Bambyke and Beroea and Heracleia, small towns once ruled by the tyrant Dionysius, the son of Heracleon. Heracleia is twenty stadia distant from the temple of Athena Cyrrhestis.) Radt (2002) 8.291. On Cyrrhestice, see Schottky, “Kyrrhestike” *NP*; Frézouls (1978) 164–77; Cohen (2006) 181–84; Honigmann RE “Kyrrhestike”.

26 Strabo 16.2.8: “Εἴτα ἡ Κυρρηστική μέχρι τῆς Ἀντιοχίδος· ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἄρκτων ἐστὶ τό τε Ἀμανὸν πλῆσιον καὶ ἡ Κομμαγενή· συνάπτει δὲ τοῦτοις ἡ Κυρρηστική μέχρι δεῦρο παρατείνουσα. ἐνταῦθα δ' ἐστὶ πόλις Γίνδαρος, ἀκρόπολις τῆς Κυρρηστικῆς καὶ ληστήριον εὐφυές, καὶ Ἡράκλειόν τι καλούμενον πλῆσιον ἱερόν· περὶ οὗς τόπους ὑπὸ Οὐεντιδίου Πάκωρος διεφθάρη, ὁ πρεσβύτατος τῶν τοῦ Παρθυαίου παιδῶν, ἐπιστρατεύσας τῇ Συρίᾳ. τῇ δὲ Γινδάρῳ συνάπτουσιν αἱ Πάγραι τῆς Ἀντιοχίδος, χωρίον ἐρυμνὸν κατὰ τὴν ὑπέρθεσιν τοῦ Ἀμανοῦ τὴν ἐκ τῶν Ἀμανίδων πυλῶν εἰς τὴν Συρίαν κείμενον. ὑποπίπτει μὲν οὖν ταῖς Πάγραις τό τῶν Ἀντιοχέων πεδίων...” (Then there is Cyrrhestice as far as Antiocheia. To the north is the Amanus and Commagene. Cyrrhestice, reaching that far, borders on these. Here is the city of Gindaros, the acropolis of Cyrrhestice and useful for bandits, and nearby a place called Heracleia. Around these places Pakores, eldest child of the Parthian king, was killed by Ventidius when he marched against Syria. Pagrai in Antiocheia is on the border of Gindaros, a fortified place

region, Strabo placed Gindaros and a Heracleion, but he strongly implies that Bambyke, Beroea and Heracleia are to be included. Strabo describes these three small cities (πολίχνια) as lying to the east of Antiochia (πρὸς ἔω) and between that region and the Euphrates.²⁷ The locations of Bambyke and Beroea (modern Aleppo) are well known, but that of Heracleia is not.²⁸ Gindaros was probably named for the Macedonian city Genderos; the Hellenistic name is preserved in the modern town of Jindires.²⁹ Strabo notably omits the eponymous Macedonian foundation of Cyrrhos, the trace of which may remain in his reference to the temple of Athena Cyrrhesis, 20 stadia from Heracleia.³⁰

Strabo's selection of Greek and Macedonia cities and temples reinforces Hellenistic imperial structures. Moreover, his narrative includes a historical aside which locates Roman imperial power in Cyrrhестice. After reporting Gindaros and Heracleia, he notes that "around these places Pakores, eldest child of the Parthian king, was killed by Ventidius when he marched against Syria."³¹ Thus Strabo marks the landscape with a Roman victory over an heir to the Parthian throne. This reference also makes Pakores the aggressor against implied Roman territory, obfuscating a considerably more complicated situation.³²

1.3 *Chalcidice*

Following his description of Cyrrhестice, Strabo's narrative again moves to the coast, this time to describe Laodiceia (16.2.9), before returning inland to treat Apamea (16.2.10) then Chalcidice:

Bordering on the land of the Apameians, to the east, is the land of Arab chieftains called Parapotamia as also Chalcidice coming down from Massyas, and all the country to the south of the Apameians, which is full of tent-dwelling (*Skenitai*) people. These are similar to the nomads in Mesopotamia. For those nearer to the Syrians are always more civilised,

near the pass over the Amanus between the Amanus Gates and Syria. The plain of the Antiocheians lies under Pagrai ...).

27 Strabo 16.2.7.

28 For Bambyke see below, Southern Parts. Heracleia: Cohen (2006) 171–72; Radt (2002) 8.290.

29 Pliny *NH* 5.81. Cohen (2006) 170–71; Jones (1971) 262, n. 48; Radt (2002) 8.291; Kettenhofen, "Gindaros", *Elran*. Ptolemy (5.15.15) places Gindaros in Seleuceia rather than Cyrrhестice.

30 Cyrrhos: Frézouls (1954); Frézouls (1978) 178–96; Cohen (2006) 181–84. For the temple of Athena Cyrrhesis: Strabo 16.2.7; Radt (2002) 8.291; 'Kyrrhos' *PECS*, p. 473.

31 Strabo 16.2.8. For a description of Ventidius' campaign against Pakores, see Chapter 1.

32 Dio (49.20.4) reports that physical proof of Pakores' defeat, namely the circulation of his head around the cities, was required to bring Syria into allegiance with Rome.

and the Arabs and *Skenitai* less so, having leadership that is better organised, such as Sampsicramus, Gambarus, Themellas, and other such rulers.³³

In this region, Strabo focuses on the *Skenitai*, their political constructions and their relationship to neighbouring states.³⁴ He omits mention of several settlements known to have existed in the region in the Hellenistic period, including Chalcis on the Belos, the numerous towns and fortresses along the Euphrates noted by Isidore of Charax, and Dura Europos, at this time a Parthian fortress city.³⁵ Of particular interest in this passage is the way Strabo describes Parapotamia and Chalcidice. The former is defined by the presence of Arabian political units and the Euphrates (ἡ τῶν φυλάρχων Ἀράβων καλουμένη Παραποταμία), the latter by a geographic relationship (ἡ Χαλκιδική ἀπὸ τοῦ Μασσίου καθήκουσα).³⁶ All of these areas are explicitly east of Apamea and implicitly south of Cyrrhестice. Furthermore, Chalcidice is “down from

33 Strabo 16.2.11: “Ὁμορος δ’ ἐστὶ τῇ Ἀπαμέων πρὸς ἔω μὲν ἡ τῶν φυλάρχων Ἀράβων καλουμένη Παραποταμία καὶ ἡ Χαλκιδική ἀπὸ τοῦ Μασσίου καθήκουσα καὶ πᾶσα ἡ πρὸς νότον τοῖς Ἀπαμεύσιν, ἀνδρῶν σκηνιτῶν τὸ πλεόν· παραπλήσιοι δ’ εἰσὶ τοῖς ἐν τῇ Μεσοποταμίᾳ νομάσιν· αἱ δ’ οἱ πλησιαιτέροις τοῖς Σύροις ἡμερώτεροι καὶ ἦττον Ἀραβες καὶ σκηνίται, ἡγεμονίας ἔχοντες συντεταγμέναις μᾶλλον, καθάπερ ἡ Σαμψικεράμου καὶ ἡ Γαμβάρου καὶ ἡ Θέμελλα καὶ ἄλλων τοιούτων.” Radt (2002) 8.297.

34 This is also the manner in which he treats the southern parts of Mesopotamia, see Chapter 5.

35 Chalcis: Pliny *NH* 5.81; App. *Syr.* 57; Cohen (2006) 143–45. Euphrates towns: Isidore 1. Dura Europos: Arnaud (1986); Sommer (2005) 270–354; Cohen (2006) 156–69; Edwell (2008) 68–69; Polyb. 5.48.13–16.

36 In fact, this region of the North Arabian steppe is divided into three parts. A third section is defined by a cardinal reference from a geographic point and by its inhabitants (πᾶσα ἡ πρὸς νότον τοῖς Ἀπαμεύσιν, ἀνδρῶν σκηνιτῶν τὸ πλεόν). There is a curious parallel between this tripartite division and that of Mesopotamia in the previous chapter of book 16. There, Strabo divides Mesopotamia proper into three parts using relative topology, physical geography and demography as references: One part is along the mountains (ἡ παρόρειος, Strabo 16.1.23), another is inhabited by the Gordyceans (τὰ τῶν Γορδυαίων χωρία, Strabo 16.1.24), and the last is towards the south and further from the mountains (τὰ δὲ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν κεκλιμένα καὶ ἀπωτέρω τῶν ὀρών, Strabo 16.1.26). Each of these parts uses a different style of geographic division. The first, ἡ παρόρειος, uses a category of physical geography (the mountains) as a reference. The second, τὰ τῶν Γορδυαίων χωρία, describes the space according to the population (the Gordyceans) which inhabits it. The last, τὰ δὲ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν κεκλιμένα καὶ ἀπωτέρω τῶν ὀρών, uses two referential features: relative spatial topology (cardinal directions) and physical geography (the mountains). In his description of Syria, the three areas are defined by political and population units, by geography, and by relative spatial topology and human geography. The exact categories correspond quite closely, but that correspondence is less important than the stylistic choice to divide space into three areas each defined and described according to different geographical criteria.

Massyas”, that is, downhill from the Bekaa Valley to the south.³⁷ Strabo places Parapotamia east of Chalcidice and along the Euphrates, perhaps as far as Babylonia, but beyond that is unclear.³⁸

Strabo’s brief notice of the existence of Parapotamia does not alleviate the obscurity of the region. It was an administrative unit under the Seleucids and was maintained as such by the Parthians, probably governed from Dura Europus by both.³⁹ Polybius mentions its existence during the campaign of Molon in 222 BCE, who “occupied Parapotamia as far as the city of Europus and Mesopotamia as far as Dura.”⁴⁰ These lines describe activities undertaken by Molon’s forces while he was at Seleucia on the Tigris. Polybius’ “Europos” is Dura Europos, while “Dura” is a town on the Tigris.⁴¹ Several loan documents of the Parthian period attest to the presence of officials responsible for the administrative region of Parapotamia, including a responsibility for mediating relations with local pastoralist tribes.⁴² Parapotamia continued to be an administrative region into the Roman period, as attested by a fragmentary letter from the reign of Elagabalus (218–222 CE) found at Dura Europos.⁴³

1.4 *Mygdonia*

Strabo divides Mesopotamia into three parts, the first of which is ἡ παρόρειος, the part near the mountains, which includes at least part of the land alongside the Euphrates:

-
- 37 Strabo describes the Massyas Plain at 16.2.18. Massyas/the Bekaa valley is south of Apamea. Massyas contains a second Chalcis, under mount Libanus, possibly at modern Gerrha, Cohen (2006) 239–42; Butcher (2003) 93; Myers (2010) 82–83. Strabo describes Coele-Syria as “above Seleucis” (ὑπὲρ τῆς Σελευκίδος) at 16.2.21.
- 38 Strabo writes that Babylonia is bounded on the west by Skenitai: “Περιέχεται δ’ ἡ χώρα τῶν Βαβυλωνίων... ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ἐσπέρας ὑπὸ τε Ἀράβων τῶν σκηνιτῶν μέχρι τῆς Ἀδιαβηνῆς καὶ τῆς Γορδουαίας...” (16.1.8). At 16.1.27, Strabo uses τὴν παραποταμίαν to refer to the land along the river which merchants often avoided due to the high tariffs imposed by the local rulers. It is unclear whether he intends to use “parapotamia” to refer to a region or administrative area, or simply as a description of the space.
- 39 Chaumont (1984) 82, 91–92; Arnaud (1986) 137; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 44; Edwell (2008) 68–69.
- 40 Polyb. 5.48.16: “τὴν μὲν Παραποταμίαν μέχρι πόλεως Εὐρώπου κατέσχε, τὴν δὲ Μεσσοποταμίαν ἕως Δούρων.”
- 41 Walbank (1957) 1.579–580. Dura on the Tigris: Polyb. 5.52.2; Amm. Marc. 25.6.9; Walbank (1957) 1.582.
- 42 Papyrii of the Parthian period which mention Parapotamia: *P. Dura* 18 (87 CE), *P. Dura* 19 (121 CE) and *P. Dura* 20 (121 CE). Arnaud (1986) 137–38.
- 43 *P. Dura* 55; Edwell (2008) 69.

The land near the mountains is sufficiently fertile. The Mygdonians (as the Macedonians call them) hold the lands near the Euphrates and Zeugma, both the current Zeugma in Commagene and the old Zeugma near Thapsacus. In Mygdonia are Nisibis, also called Mygdonian Antioch, which lies under Mount Masius, as well as Tigranocerta, the lands of Carrhae and Nikephorion, Chordiraza and Sinnaca, where Crassus was killed, seized treacherously by Suren the Parthian general.⁴⁴

The name of the people, Mygdones (οἱ Μυγδόνες), and thus the area, Mygdonia, derived from the early Hellenistic colonisation of the region by the Macedonians. Strabo reports that the Mygdones were named by the Macedonians (κατονομασθέντες ὑπὸ τῶν Μακεδόνων), but it is unclear how they came to apply this particular name to these people. Three modes of naming are attested within the Greek and Macedonian colonial project: the imposition of an entirely new name, the transliteration of an existing name, or the translation of a non-Greek word into Greek. This latter mode could include the identification of an eponymous founder from Greek mythology with some aspect of local culture or topography, as may be the case here.⁴⁵ The Greek name Mygdones was probably derived in some way from the Phrygian hero named Mygdon who appears in the *Iliad*.⁴⁶

Having fixed Hellenistic imperial structures into the landscape, Strabo again specifies a historical event in the space which reinforces Roman power. In this case, the Roman defeat at Carrhae is alluded to through the post-battle episode of Crassus' capture and execution by Suren. This serves as an opportunity to characterise the Parthians as treacherous; Strabo makes no mention of the context of Crassus' invasion of the Parthian sphere. A version of this episode would have been familiar to his Roman audience. The versions relayed by Plutarch and Cassius Dio emphasise Crassus' personal tactical, moral and religious failings spiced with a heavy serving of the familiar tropes of Eastern

44 Strabo 16.1.23: “Ἔστι δ' ἡ μὲν παρόρειος εὐδαίμων ἰκανῶς· ἔχουσι δ' αὐτῆς τὰ μὲν πρὸς τῷ Εὐφράτῃ καὶ τῷ ζεύγματι, τῷ τε νῦν τῷ κατὰ τὴν Κομμαγενὴν καὶ τῷ πάλαι τῷ κατὰ τὴν Θάψακον, οἱ Μυγδόνες κατονομασθέντες ὑπὸ τῶν Μακεδόνων· ἐν οἷς ἐστὶν ἡ Νίσιβις, ἣν καὶ αὐτὴν Ἀντιόχειαν τὴν ἐν τῇ Μυγδονίᾳ προσηγόρευσαν, ὑπὸ τῷ Μασίῳ ὄρει κειμένην, καὶ Τιγρανόκερτα καὶ τὰ περὶ Κάρρας καὶ Νικηφόριον χωρία καὶ Χορδίραζα καὶ Σίννακα, ἐν ᾗ Κράσσος διεφθάρη, δόλῳ ληφθεὶς ὑπὸ Σουρήνα τοῦ τῶν Παρθυαίων στρατηγοῦ.” Biffi (2002) 164–65.

45 Pigulevskaia (1963) 51 suggests that “Mygdonia” is derived from the Syriac *magda* (ܡܓܕܐ, “fruit”).

46 Hom. *Il.* 3.186. There are many other examples of this throughout Asia. In close proximity, note the implicit link between the hero Gordys and the region Gordyene at Strabo 16.1.25: “Λέγεται δὲ Γόρδυς ὁ Τριπτολέμου τὴν Γορδυηνὴν οἰκῆσαι...” (Gordys, the son of Triptolemus, is said to have taken up his abode in Gordyenê ...).

treachery.⁴⁷ Strabo reinforces that narrative by using only Crassus' personal fate and a negative characterisation of the Parthian general to allude to the entire campaign and inscribe it on the geography of Mygdonia.

While it is implied, it is not precisely clear whether Strabo's ἡ παρόρειος and the land he assigns to οἱ Μυγδόνες are the same.⁴⁸ The descriptions of the two spaces are not explicitly linked by the grammar of the passage (the list of cities is linked to Mygdonia by ἐν οἷς ἐστίν), but Strabo supplies no additional subdivisions of ἡ παρόρειος. Moreover, his scant depiction of ἡ παρόρειος – it is εὐδαίμων ἱκανῶς – matches the characterisation of Mygdonia in other sources. Describing a gift of part of Armenia to a Parthian king, Josephus notes that the country around Nisibis is ἀγαθός, surely a reference to its fertility.⁴⁹ In Polybius' account of Antiochus III's march across Mesopotamia against the rebellious satrap Molon, Antiochus and his army sit out the worst of the winter for 40 days at Nisibis. This implies the ability to store substantial quantities of food probably drawn from a fertile hinterland.⁵⁰ Finally, in his campaign against Tigranes, Lucullus had defeated the Armenian forces blocking the road to their capital at Artaxata (near modern Artashat), but bad weather and discontent in the ranks forced him to turn south to Mesopotamia. The army descended into Mygdonia, a χώραν παμφόρον καὶ ἀλεινήν ("an area productive and open to the sun").⁵¹

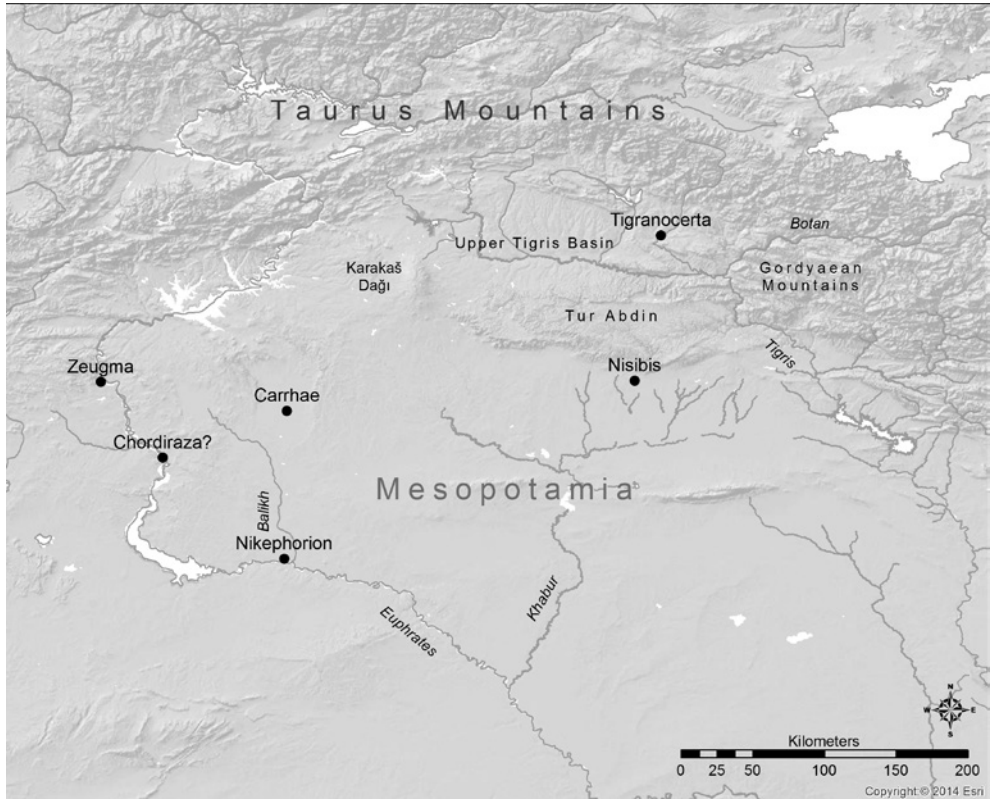
47 Plut. *Cras.* 17–30. Dio 40.16–27.

48 Ptolemy does not help. His text lists some of the cities mentioned in Strabo, but he does not identify Mygdonia among the *chora* of Mesopotamia.

49 Josephus *Ant. Jud.* 20.68: "ἔδωκεν δὲ καὶ χώραν πολλήν αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ τῶν Ἀρμενίων βασιλείᾳ. Νίσιβις δὲ ἐστὶν ὄνομα τῇ γῇ, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ πρότερον Μακεδόνες ἐκτίσαντο πόλιν Ἀντιόχειαν, ἣν Ἐπιμυγδονίαν προσηγόρευσαν." (He furthermore gave him an extensive and productive territory which he carved from that of the king of Armenia. The district is called Nisibis, and in it the Macedonians had in days of old founded the city of Antioch which they surnamed Epimygdonia.) Loeb trans. Josephus identifies the city as Antioch Epimygdonia (i.e. Mygdonian Antioch) and the district around it as Nisibis. This confusion of city and surrounding area is frequently seen for Batnae and Anthemusia: Regling (1901) 450–51; Jones (1971) 441; Syme (1995) 107–8; Chaumont (1984) 1984. Cassius Dio (68.26.1) mentions the forests around Nisibis which existed in Trajan's time. Ammianus Marcellinus (19.9.5) also mentions forests between Samosata and Nisibis in the fourth century.

50 Polybius 5.51.1. See Chapter 1.

51 Plut. *Luc.* 32.4: "ὥς δ' οὐκ ἔπειθεν, ἀπῆγεν αὐτοὺς ὀπίσω, καὶ κατ' ἄλλας ὑπερβολὰς διελθὼν τὸν Ταύρον, εἰς τὴν λεγομένην Μυγδονικὴν κατέβαινε, χώραν παμφόρον καὶ ἀλεινήν καὶ πόλιν ἐν αὐτῇ μεγάλην καὶ πολυάνθρωπον ἔχουσαν, ἣν οἱ μὲν βάρβαροι Νίσιβιν, οἱ δ' Ἕλληνες Ἀντιόχειαν Μυγδονικὴν προσηγόρευον." (But since he could not persuade them, he led them back, and crossing the Taurus by another pass, descended into the country called Mygdonia, which is fertile and open to the sun, and contains a large and populous city, called Nisibis by the Barbarians, Antioch in Mygdonia by the Greeks.) Loeb trans.



MAP 4.2 Strabo's Mygdonia

The cities and places included by Strabo in Mygdonia are not related in a geographical order; however, it is not a coincidence that the first cities that Strabo lists in his description of the region are the two Zeugmas. Strabo describes the Mygdonians as possessing the parts near the Euphrates and the two Zeugmas ($\tau\hat{\omega}$ $\nu\hat{\nu}$ Zeugma near Commagene, and $\tau\hat{\omega}$ $\pi\acute{\alpha}\lambda\alpha\iota$ Zeugma near Thapsacus), both of which lie on the Euphrates. The location of Thapsacus is debated.⁵²

52 The location of Thapsacus is one of the most problematic questions in Mesopotamian historical geography. For a brief summary of early scholarship, see Honigsmann, "Θάψακος", *RE*, Halb. 9, cols. 1272–80, esp. 1277. Sarre and Herzfeld (1911) argued for a location near Raqqa, which Musil strongly rejected, himself placing it at the Euphrates bend, (1927) 217–20. More recently, Gawlikowski (1996) has argued that Thapsacus should be located at Zeugma; Comfort et al. (2000) argued that there was no evidence for pre-Hellenistic settlement at Zeugma and use satellite imagery to show that there were at least five routes across the Euphrates between Zeugma and Samosata alone. Despite Gawlikowski's objections, Briant (2002) 375–76 argues for a location near Carchemish, a site which lies too

The town usually referred to as Zeugma today lies west of the Euphrates. It was also known as Seleucia on the Euphrates and was paired with a twin on the east bank, Apamaea. In his description of Commagene, Strabo referred to Seleucia as a “fortress of Mesopotamia”.⁵³ Strabo mentions Zeugma/Seleucia in the context of geographical areas on both sides of the Euphrates (Commagene and Mygdonia). For Strabo, river crossings and their accompanying cities share and connect both banks. This conception is based more in the praxis and experience of a river crossing than a precise topographical location. It is also entirely fitting with Strabo’s name for the site, Zeugma, which means “crossing”. The crossing points over the Euphrates were critical points of contact with important trade and military routes between Roman Syria and Parthian Babylonia, as their use by Alexander and Cyrus the Younger show.⁵⁴

The remaining places that Strabo assigns to the Mygdonians are Nisibis, Tigranocerta, Carrhae, Nikephorion, Chordiraza and Sinnaca. Three of these places are cities with well-known locations: Nisibis is modern Nusaybin; Carrhae is ancient Harran, near modern Altinbasak, 44 km southeast of Şanlıurfa (ancient Edessa); and the remains of Nikephorion are near the modern Syrian town of Ar-Raqqā.⁵⁵ Of those three cities, only Nikephorion is on the Euphrates, but almost 200 km from the Taurus Mountains, while Nisibis is a similar distance from the Euphrates, but quite close to the mountains – very

close to the Turko-Syrian border to permit excavation, on the basis of a fifth century BCE Achaemenid military cemetery, probably to be associated with a garrison, 27 km SW of that site. Syme (1995) 97–99 thought to have narrowed the window of proposed locations to a “stretch of some fifty miles or more”, but it remains a stretch of river approaching 500km in length. It should be noted that Xenophon describes Thapsacus as a πόλις μεγάλη καὶ εὐδαίμων (Xen. *Anab.* 1.4.11). One would expect a “large and prosperous city” to have left a locally significant set of archaeological remains. Fales (1995) 208 list of most likely candidates (Carchemish, Birecik and Til Barsip) all fit Xenophon’s description. Carchemish is particularly promising. Between the ninth and seventh centuries BCE, the city comprised a citadel, walled inner town, walled outer town, and covered 94 hectares (almost a square kilometre). Til Barsib was half as big at 47 hectares, but still a large area. Woolley (1914); Mazzoni (1995) 184–86, esp. n. 23 and fig. 1. For all that, none of these potential locations of Strabo’s *Zeugmata* help narrow Strabo’s conception of Mygdonia, which includes cities lying at least as far down the Euphrates as Nikephorion; even placing Thapsacus near Zenobia would scarcely stretch the window of possibility. Most of these sites are shown on Map 3.2.

53 Strabo 16.2.3.

54 Cyrus: Xen. *Anab.* 1.4.9–11, 17–18; Diod. Sic. 14.21.5. Alexander: Arr. *Anab.* 2.13.1; 3.6.4. Routes of commercial movement across Mesopotamia are discussed in Chapter 6.

55 Nisibis: Cohen (2013) 62–67; Russell (2005); Pigulevskaja (1963) 49–51; Radt (2002) 8.278; Kessler, Karlheinz, ‘Nisibis’, *BNP* 9.777–79. Carrhae: Cohen (2013) 79–81; Radt (2002) 8.279; Kessler, Karlheinz, ‘Harran’ *BNP* 5.1152. Nikephorion: Cohen (2013) 83–88; Radt (2002) 8.279; Kessler, Karlheinz, ‘Nikephorium’ *BNP* 9.714.

close if the Tur Abdin is included.⁵⁶ Two of the other locations, Chordiraza and Sinnaca, both lie in northwest Mesopotamia: the former near the Euphrates and the latter near Carrhae.⁵⁷ It may seem that these distances stretch the definition of *παρόρειος* and *πρὸς τῷ Εὐφράτῃ*, but since Strabo is explicit that Nisibis belongs to the Mygdonians (he calls it Mygdonian Antiocheia), despite the distance from the river, it is permissible to grant the same loose application of proximity to the mountains to the rest of the Mygdonian lands. Moreover, if ἡ *παρόρειος* and Mygdonia are the same, then Strabo has already defined the Mygdonians as inhabiting lands near the mountains as well as *πρὸς τῷ Εὐφράτῃ*.

The location of the final site mentioned by Strabo is much disputed by modern scholars. The remains of Tigranocerta, the first-century BCE capital of Tigranes' short-lived Armenian Empire, have not been securely identified despite the relative abundance of literary records mentioning it.⁵⁸ Three sites in particular have been proposed: Tell Ermen (modern Kızıltepe) south of the Tur Abdin and west of Nisibis;⁵⁹ late-antique Martyropolis (modern Meiafarkin, now usually known by its Turkish name, Silvan) north of the Tigris at the foot of the Taurus;⁶⁰ and at a set of badly decayed ruins at Arzan, also north of the Tigris, but further east on the banks of the Garzan-su.⁶¹ Those sources which specifically mention the location of Tigranocerta relative to the Tigris place the city to the north, between the Tigris and the Taurus range proper, while several other sources place the city in Armenia, which implies a site north of the Tigris.⁶² This casts serious doubt on Tell Ermen on the Mesopotamian plain near Nisibis. Literary descriptions of the site and the nearby river in the descriptions provided by Tacitus, Pliny, and Plutarch render Martyropolis an unlikely candidate.⁶³ This leaves Arzan, which matches the various descriptions best, but not perfectly (there are some discrepancies with Plutarch's account). Nevertheless, it remains the most likely candidate.

56 Lehmann-Haupt (1910) 1.370 suggests an etymological relationship between Tur and Taurus. Radt (2002) 7.306.

57 The exact location of Sinnaca is unknown. As well as Strabo, it is mentioned by Plut. *Cras.* 17–33; Dio 40.12–27 as the site of Crassus' ultimate demise. Biffi (2002) 165.

58 Strabo 11.12.4, 11.14.15, 12.2.9, 16.1.23; Pliny *NH* 6.26–27; Tac. *Ann.* 15.5; Plut. *Luc.* 25–29; Ptol. *Geog.* 5.13.22; Dio 36.1b–2; Eutropius 6.9; Orosius 6.3.6; *Tab. Peut.* 10B3; *Buzandaran Patmut'wnk'* 4.24 (Garsoïan (1989)); Zosimus 3.32.

59 Henderson (1903); Rice Holmes (1917); Dillemann (1962).

60 Kiepert (1875); Eckhardt (1909); Syme (1995) 65.

61 Sinclair (1994); Sinclair (1996).

62 Relative to the Tigris: Ptol. *Geog.* 5.13.22; *Tab. Peut.* 10B3; Orosius 6.3.6; Plut. *Luc.* 24.7. In Armenia: Pliny *NH* 6.26; Eutropius 6.9; *Buzandaran Patmut'wnk'* 4.24.

63 Tac. *Ann.* 15.4; Pliny *NH* 6.129; Plut. *Luc.* 27.

1.5 *Gordyene*

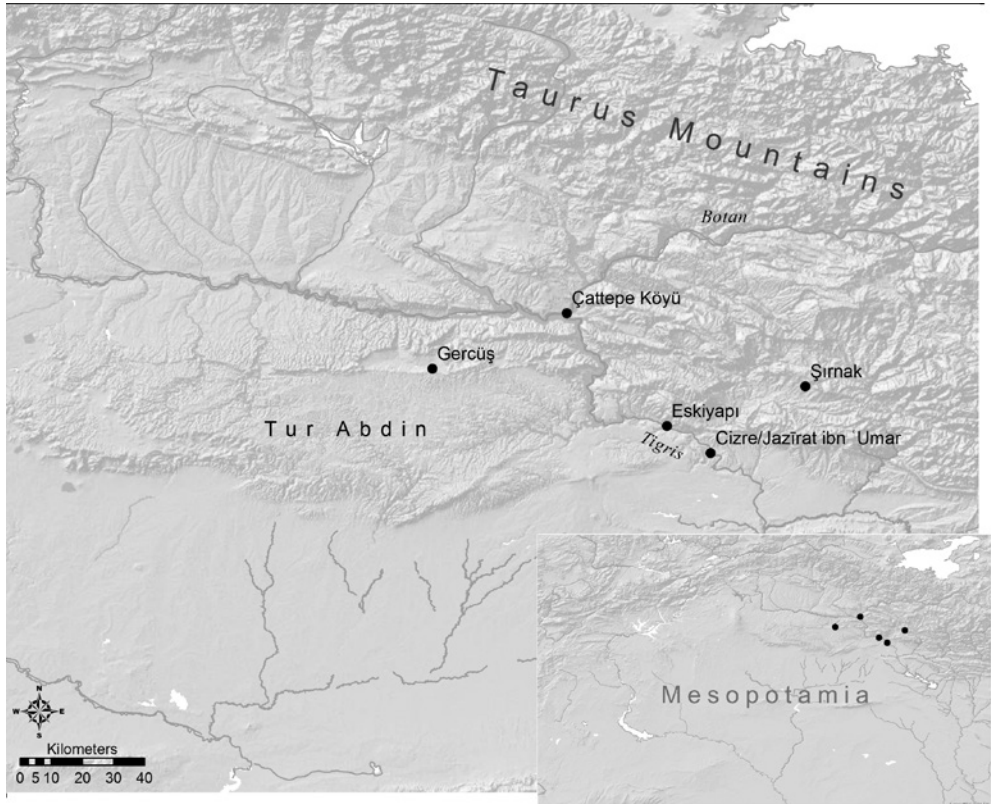
Next in Strabo's presentation comes Gordyene, the second of the three parts into which he divides Mesopotamia:

Near the Tigris are the places of the Gordyaiaans, who were once called Carduchians. Their cities are Sareisa, Satalka and Pinaka, a very strong fortress with three citadels, each fortified by its own walls so that it is a kind of triple city. But the Armenian [king] held it as a subject and the Romans seized it by force, although the Gordyeni had a particular reputation as builders and were skilled in the technologies of siege warfare; for this reason Tigranes employed them in this capacity. The rest of Mesopotamia also came under Roman control and Pompey assigned to Tigranes most of this region – those parts worth mentioning. For the area is rich in pasturage and flourishing, bearing both evergreens and the spice amomum; it is also a feeding ground for lions; and it produces naptha and the stone gangitis, which reptiles avoid.⁶⁴

There are three parts to Strabo's description of Gordyene: a geographical description of the location and contents of the space, a brief overview of political control, and a description of the flora and fauna of the area. The cities and fortresses named by Strabo are too insecurely located to contribute to our understanding of Strabo's conception of Gordyene. The long-standing equation of Pinaka (Πίνακα) with the modern village of Finek has been confirmed in recent decades,⁶⁵ but the locations of Sareisa (Σάρεισά) and Satalka

64 Strabo 16.1.24: "Πρὸς δὲ τῷ Τίγρει τὰ τῶν Γορδυαίων χωρία οὓς οἱ πάλαι Καρδούχους ἔλεγον, καὶ αἱ πόλεις αὐτῶν Σάρεισά τε καὶ Σάταλκα καὶ Πίνακα, κράτιστον ἔρυμα, τρεῖς ἄκρας ἔχουσα, ἐκάστην ἰδίῳ τείχει τετεχισμένην, ὥστε οἷον τρίπολιν εἶναι. ἀλλ' ὅμως καὶ ὁ Ἀρμένιος εἶχεν ὑπήκοον καὶ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι βίᾳ παρέλαβον, καίπερ ἔδοξαν οἱ Γορδυαῖοι διαφερόντως ἀρχιτεκτονικοὶ τινες εἶναι καὶ πολιορκητικῶν ὀργάνων ἔμπειροι· διόπερ αὐτοῖς εἰς ταῦτα ὁ Τιγράνης ἐχρήτο. ἐγένετο δὲ καὶ ἡ λοιπὴ Μεσοποταμία ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίοις, Πομπήιος δ' αὐτῆς τὰ πολλὰ τῷ Τιγράνη προσένειμεν ὅσα ἦν ἀξιόλογα· ἔστι γὰρ εὐβοτος ἡ χώρα καὶ εὐερνῆς ὥστε καὶ τὰ ἀειθαλὴ τρέφειν καὶ ἄρωμα τὸ ἄμωμον· καὶ λεοντοβότος ἐστὶ· φέρει δὲ καὶ τὸν νάφθαν καὶ τὴν γαγγήτιν λίθον, ἣν φεύγει τὰ ἔρπετά." Amomum is an aromatic spice related to cardamom; Biffi (2002) 167.

65 For example: Dillemann (1962) 84; Syme (1995) 30 nn.9, 54. Strabo describes Pinaka as a strongly fortified site with three citadels ("κράτιστον ἔρυμα, τρεῖς ἄκρας ἔχουσα, ἐκάστην ἰδίῳ τείχει τετεχισμένην, ὥστε οἷον τρίπολιν εἶναι"). Ammianus (20.7.1) reports that the late antique fortress of Bezabde was originally called Phaenicha: "... Bezabden, quam Phaenicham quoque institutores veteres appellarunt ..." (... Bezabde, which its ancient founders once called Phaenicha ...). While it initially seems unproblematic that Pinaka, Phaenicha and Finek should be the same place, the site seemed not to match Strabo's description, Dillemann (1962) 84. However, based on a surface survey of the area, including hills on both sides of the Tigris, Algaze has identified the twin villages of Eskiyağı (Fenik)



MAP 4.3 Gordyene

(Σάταλα) are unknown. Three possible identifications for Sareisa have been suggested (Map 4.3: Gordyene): The Barrington Atlas suggests Şırnak in the Taurus/Gordyean Mountains, northeast of Cizre;⁶⁶ Syme suggests that the site be located near the confluence of the Bohtan and the Tigris;⁶⁷ Dillemann calls the identification of Sareisa with “Charich” (Turkish Gercüş) in the Tur Abdin north of Nisibis plausible and offers Chattakh as an identification of

and Hendekköy which lie on the Tigris about 13 km north of Cizre with Strabo's Pinaka and the Phaenicha/Bezabde of Ammianus Marcellinus, Algaze (1989) 247–52.

66 *BAAtlas* 89 E3.

67 Sarisa may be the same place as the Še-ri-eš-še conquered by Tiglath-Pileser I, Syme (1995) 54 n. 32.

Satalka.⁶⁸ None of these suggestions are supported with significant argument. The location and identification of Sareisa must await archaeological exploration of these sites.

Strabo's description of Gordyene also relates the area to Roman power and to an imperial past. In his narrative, Gordyene was held by the Armenian king, seized by the Romans, then given back to the Armenian king. This account of the superiority of Roman state power (in the person of Pompey) over Armenian state power (in the person of Tigranes) is a clear demonstration of Rome's power to control the political geography of a region and the territorial authority of subordinate states. Strabo's placement of Tigranocerta, Tigranes' short-lived southern capital, in Mygdonia rather than in Gordyene may play into Strabo's presentation.⁶⁹ Strabo represents the Gordyaian as a warlike, mountain people occupying a land rich in primary resources (plants, minerals and pasturage) and wild beasts.⁷⁰ By placing Tigranocerta in settled, urban Mygdonia, Strabo links that Armenian Hellenistic foundation to the Greek Hellenistic foundations he describes in that region.

1.6 *Southern Parts*

The third and final sub-division of Strabo's Mesopotamia comprises the southern parts of Mesopotamia, τὰ δὲ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν κεκλιμένα τῆς Μεσοποταμίας καὶ ἀπωτέρω τῶν ὄρων, "the parts of Mesopotamia towards the south and further from the mountains". In this section, Strabo refers to several cities in the area and settled communities along the Euphrates (see Map 4.2: Strabo's Mygdonia). His text raises several questions about the relationship between these settled communities and the spaces he describes. I will discuss these questions after considering the most prominent population of the area, the Skenitai:

The Skenitai Arabs occupy those parts of Mesopotamia which incline towards the south and are farther from the mountains, and are waterless and barren. [The Skenitai] are bandits and shepherds, who readily move from place to place when pasture and booty fail them. As a result, the people near the mountains are harassed by the Skenitai and also by the Armenians, who dwell above them and oppress them through brute

68 Dillemann (1962) 111; Matthews (1989) 50–51. Dillemann locates Chattakh deeper in the Taurus Mountains, on the bank of the Botan south of Lake Van.

69 The degree to which Strabo understood the location of Tigranocerta is debated, see the discussions of the location of Tigranocerta (above) and Gordyene (Chapter 3).

70 The pastoralist flavour of Strabo's description will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

force. They are subject mostly to the Armenians or else to the Parthians, who, possessing both Media and Babylonia, are situated on the sides of the country.⁷¹

The pastoralist people that Strabo calls Skenitai (tent-dwelling) Arabs dwell in these southern parts of Mesopotamia away from the mountains (ἀπωτέρω τῶν ὀρέων).⁷² Although Strabo characterises their land as barren and waterless (ἄνυδρα καὶ λυπρὰ ὄντα), much of it is not desert. Rather, it is marginal land capable of supporting pastoralism: the Skenitai are ποιμενικοί (shepherds) who move about between pasture-lands (αἱ νομαί). It is not possible to fix a line precisely between the regions to the north which support dryland farming and the regions to the south capable only of nomadic pastoralism, but it probably lies somewhere around a line between Singara and the confluence of the Balikh and Euphrates Rivers. The land above this line (the 200 mm isohyet) receives an average annual rainfall of 200 mm or more, sufficient for reliable dryland farming (i.e. farming dependent on irrigation).⁷³ Pastoralists follow traditional routes between pasture-lands as periodic seasonal rainfall and grass growth permits.

Settled people did dwell in the arid regions below the 200mm isohyet, especially along the rivers where irrigation was possible. Strabo mentions such people in his description of the main route through Mesopotamia between the Mediterranean and Babylonia, as will be discussed in chapter 5. Navigation of this route was mediated by the Skenitai, but there is evidence of several settled communities along the way. Strabo writes:

Between the Euphrates and the Tigris there flows another river, called Basileius; and in the neighbourhood of Anthemusia still another, called Aborras. The road for people travelling from Syria to Seleucia and Babylon runs through the country of the Skenitai, now called Malians by some writers, and through their desert. Such travellers cross the Euphrates near Anthemusia, a place in Mesopotamia; and above the river, at a distance of four *schoinoi*, lies Bambycê, which is also called Edessa and Hierapolis,

71 Strabo 16.1.26: “τὰ δὲ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν κεκλιμένα τῆς Μεσοποταμίας καὶ ἀπωτέρω τῶν ὀρέων ἄνυδρα καὶ λυπρὰ ὄντα ἔχουσιν οἱ σκηνῖται Ἰσραβες, ληστρικοὶ τινες καὶ ποιμενικοὶ, μεθιστάμενοι ῥαδίως εἰς ἄλλους τόπους, ὅταν ἐπιλείψωσιν αἱ νομαί καὶ αἱ λεηλασίαι. τοῖς οὖν παρορείοις ὑπὸ τε τούτων κακοῦσθαι συμβαίνει καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀρμενίων· ὑπέρκεινται δὲ καὶ καταδυναστεύουσι διὰ τὴν ἰσχύν· τέλος δ' ὑπ' ἐκείνοις εἰσι τὸ πλεον ἢ τοῖς Παρθυαίοις· ἐν πλευραῖς γὰρ εἰσι κάκεινοι τὴν τε Μηδίαν ἔχοντες καὶ τὴν Βαβυλωνίαν.”

72 The Skenitai are discussed further in Chapter 5.

73 See Figure 2: Physical Geography of the Middle East in Kennedy and Riley (1990) 25.

where the Syrian goddess Atargatis is worshipped; for after they cross the river, the road runs through the desert to Skenai, a noteworthy city situated on a canal towards the borders of Babylonia.... Skenai is eighteen *schoinoi* distant from Seleucia.⁷⁴

The rivers mentioned here by Strabo are the Balikh (or Balissos) and the Khabur. Strabo calls the former river “Basileios” (ἄλλος ποταμός Βασιλείος καλούμενος).⁷⁵ The Balikh itself emerges from springs south of Carrhae, but it is fed by numerous sources in the hilly, western part of northern Mesopotamia around Edessa and Carrhae. It flows south to meet the Euphrates at Raqqa/Nikephorion. The second river, which Strabo calls Ἀβόρρας, is the Khabur, usually known in Greek as Χαβώρας.⁷⁶ This river flows south from its catchment area in the Tur Abdin to join the Euphrates at Circesium.

It is not clear whether Strabo considered the settled communities of this region as part of Mygdonia or associated them with the Skenitai. This is particularly relevant to the unnamed communities along the river, but it raises the question for the named cities, too. Earlier, he had defined Mygdonia as including parts of Mesopotamia between the Zeugma in Commagene and the Zeugma at Thapsacus.⁷⁷ Knowing a precise location for Thapsacus might help in establishing the bounds of Strabo’s Mygdonia, but the location of other sites already provides us with much information in this regard. In particular, Strabo notes that Nikephorion at the confluence of the Balikh and Euphrates is part of Mygdonia.⁷⁸ Nikephorion is downstream of the probable locations for Thapsacus, although the location near Zenobia obtained by the measurements

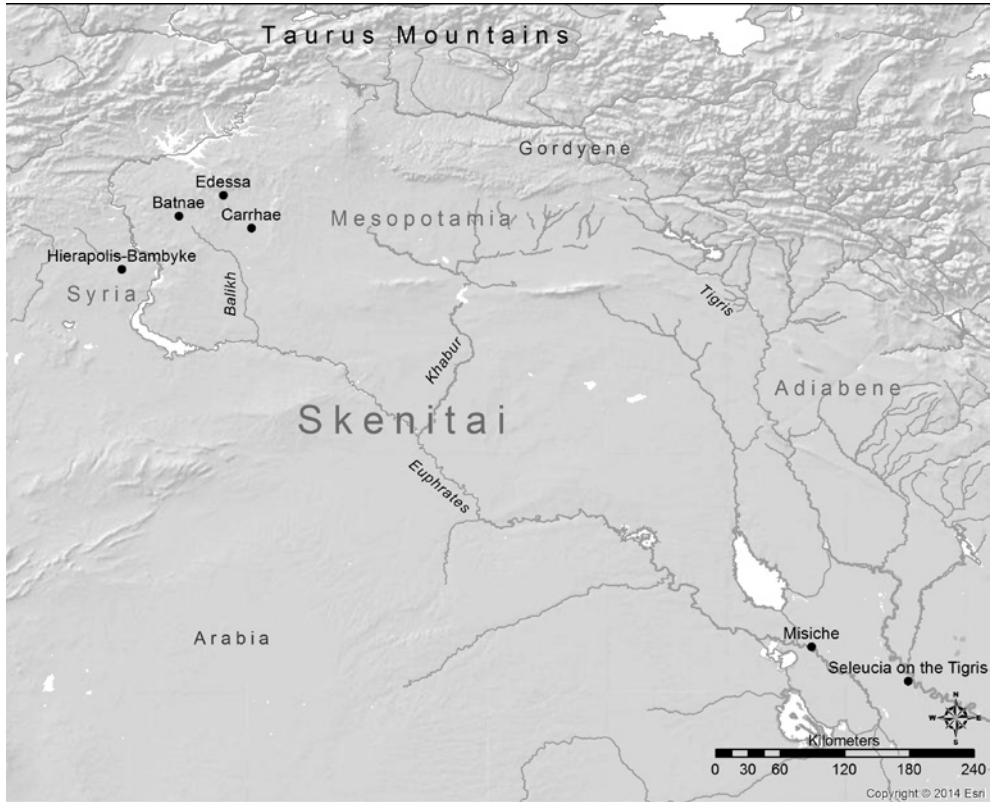
74 Strabo 16.1.27: “Μεταξὺ δὲ τοῦ Εὐφράτου καὶ τοῦ Τίγριος ρεῖ καὶ ἄλλος ποταμὸς Βασιλείος καλούμενος, καὶ περὶ τὴν Ἀνθεμουσίαν ἄλλος Ἀβόρρας· διὰ δὲ τῶν Σκηγιτῶν, ὑπὸ τῶν Μαλίων νυνὶ λεγομένων, καὶ τῆς ἐκεῖνων ἐρημίας ἡ ὁδὸς τοῖς ἐκ τῆς Συρίας εἰς Σελεύκειαν καὶ Βαβυλῶνα ἐμπορευομένοις ἐστίν. ἡ μὲν οὖν διάβασις τοῦ Εὐφράτου κατὰ τὴν Ἀνθεμουσίαν ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς, τόπον τῆς Μεσοποταμίας· ὑπέρκειται δὲ τοῦ ποταμοῦ σχοῖνους τέτταρας διέχουσα ἡ Βαμβύκη, ἣν καὶ Ἐδεσσαν καὶ Ἱερὰν πόλιν καλοῦσιν, ἐν ᾗ τιμῶσι τὴν Συρίαν θεὸν τὴν Ἀταργάτιν. διαβάντων δὲ ἡ ὁδὸς ἐστὶ διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου ἐπὶ τοὺς τῆς Βαβυλωνίας ὄρους μέχρι Σκηγῶν, ἀξιολόγου πόλεως ἐπὶ τινος διωρυγὸς ἰδρυμένης... διέχουσι δὲ τῆς Σελευκειᾶς αἱ Σκηναὶ σχοῖνους ὀκτωκαίδεκα.”

75 By metathesis of Balissos for Basileos. Strabo is perhaps confused by the canal in Babylonia called Naarmalcha by Ammianus (amnis regum, 24.6.1; Flumen regium, 23.6.25) and Royal Canal (τὴν Βασιλικὴν διώρυχα καλουμένην) by Polybius (5.51.6); Radt (2002) 8.281; Biffi (2002) 168–69.

76 Radt (2002) 8.281; Biffi (2002) 169; Kühne, “Habor” *BNP*. Ammianus Marcellinus also knows it by this name (*Abora*, 23.5.1). Ptol. *Geog.* 5.18.3.

77 Strabo 16.1.23.

78 Strabo 16.1.23. Cohen (2013) 83–88 argues that there were two cities in Mesopotamia named Nikephorion. One near Edessa on the road to Nisibis, which was later named Constantina or Constantia, and the other at modern Raqqa near the confluence of the



MAP 4.4 The Skenitai and their lands

Strabo attributes to Eratosthenes would lie further to the south. The three settled communities that Strabo mentions in this passage are Anthemusia, Bambyke and Skenai. The mention of each settlement presents a different problem.

Strabo refers to Anthemusia twice, both times in this section.⁷⁹ He describes the Khabur River as “near Anthemusia” (καὶ περὶ τὴν Ἀνθεμουσίαν ἄλλος Ἀβόρρας). A few lines latter, he refers to Anthemusia again, this time as near the

Euphrates and Balikh Rivers. The latter site was certainly called Nikephorion, the former is unconfirmed.

79 Other literary sources: Isidore of Charax 1; Tac. *Ann.* 6.41; Ptol. *Geog.* 5.18.4; Ammianus Marcellinus notes that it is a short distance from the river (“... ab Euphrate flumine brevi spatio disparatur.”). For discussion, see Cohen (2013) 57–61; as well as Dillemann (1962) 102; Syme (1995) 93, 107; Regling (1901) 452ff.; Ross (2001) 27. Radt (2002) 8.281 adds nothing to Fraenkel, “Anthemusia” *RE* 2.2369–70. On the etymological relationship between Charax Sidu and Suruç/Sarūd̲j, see Chaumont (1984) 76.

crossing of the Euphrates (ἡ μὲν οὖν διάβασις τοῦ Εὐφράτου κατὰ τὴν Ἀνθεμουσίαν ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς). On this second occasion, he specifically describes Anthemusia as a place in Mesopotamia (τόπον τῆς Μεσοποταμίας). Strabo is correct in locating Anthemusia in Mesopotamia near a crossing of the Euphrates, but it is not near the Khabur (Ἀβόρρας).⁸⁰ It is difficult to reconcile Strabo's two references without assuming he takes a very broad scale view.

The next community Strabo mentions is Bambyke (Βαμβύκη). Strabo had previously described this city as part of his description of Cyrrhestice in Syria; its remains lie west of the Euphrates near modern Manbij (derived from the Aramaic name, Mabbog), close to at least one crossing of the Euphrates (See Map 4.4).⁸¹ Aside from including the site in his description of Mesopotamia, Strabo provides information about Bambyke which otherwise conforms to the site at Manbij. He reports that Bambyke is four *schoinoi* "above" the river, which corresponds to the distance between Manbij and a crossing at the confluence of the Sadjur and Euphrates Rivers, the nearest point on the Euphrates, 20 km to the north.⁸² However, Strabo also calls Bambyke by the alternate names Edessa and Hierapolis (ἦν καὶ Ἑδεσσάν καὶ Ἱερὰν πόλιν καλοῦσιν), and he expands on the latter by specifying that the name "holy city" refers to the cult of Atargatis (ἐν ᾗ τιμῶσι τὴν Συρίαν θεὸν τὴν Ἀταργάτιν).⁸³

While Hierapolis appears often in the sources, Strabo is the only source to report the use of "Edessa" as an alternate name for Bambyke. Most scholars think

80 Syme (1995) 107.

81 The site: Hogarth (1907); Goossens (1943) 2–5; Segal (1970) 46; Oden (1977) 1–2; Burns (1999) 153–154 (with map 71, 248); Cohen (2006) 172–78; Leisten, "Bambyke" *BNP*; Elisséef, "Manbidj" *EI* 6.377–383; "This oasis is situated at an altitude of 1310 feet (398 m) in a zone of annual rainfall greater than 250 mm, bordering on two contrasting economies: to the north-north-east, a region of sedentary inhabitants, cropgrowers or craftsmen; to the south-south-west, the domain of the nomadic shepherd or stock-breeder." Lucian describes the topography of the city briefly at *De Dea Syria* 28 and the temple itself at *De Dea Syria* 30–31. Bambyke is mentioned in Assyrian records (Jones (1971) 231 n. 4) and had several other names, the most commonly known of which is Hierapolis (Pliny *NH* 5.81; Ptol. *Geog.* 5.15.13; Amm. Marc. 23.2.6), a name perhaps bestowed by Seleucus I in reference to the important cult centre of Atargatis (Aelian (*De Nat. An.* 12.2) credits Seleucus with the renaming; see Cohen (2006) 172–74; Jones (1971) 243–44 n. 24). Its local Aramaic name was Mabbog, from which the modern Arabic name of Manbij is derived.

82 A *schoinoi* is an hour's travel, see Jansen-Winkeln, "Schoinos", *BNP*; Radt (2002) 8.448; Chaumont (1984) 66–67. Musil (1927) 228 calculated the length of Isidore's *schoinoi* as approximately 4.7km.

83 Strabo 16.1.27: "ὑπέρκειται δὲ τοῦ ποταμοῦ σχοίνους τέτταρας διέχουσα ἡ Βαμβύκη, ἦν καὶ Ἑδεσσάν καὶ Ἱερὰν πόλιν καλοῦσιν, ἐν ᾗ τιμῶσι τὴν Συρίαν θεὸν τὴν Ἀταργάτιν." (Above the river, at a distance of four *schoinoi*, lies Bambycê, which is also called Edessa and Hierapolis, where the Syrian goddess Atargatis is worshipped.) Biffi (2002) 169. Lucian *De Dea Syria* 1, 10ff.

Strabo has confused and conflated Bambyke and Edessa (on the Kallirhoe),⁸⁴ but Brodersen suggests that Edessa was an official name of Bambyke.⁸⁵ To add to the complication, Strabo's note about Atargatis could apply to either city. Bambyke was the centre of the Syrian Atargatis cult, but that goddess was also worshipped at Edessa into the late empire.⁸⁶ Bambyke is quite close to Edessa on the Kallirhoe, so we might expect that the proximity of two towns named Edessa would be needlessly confusing and reduce the likelihood of a Seleucid king applying the name "Edessa" to Bambyke; however, the large number of cities named Antioch across the Seleucid realm is a good indication that the kings had no such concern. In particular, if we consider the three important Antiochs in or near the Mesopotamian Borderland, Antioch on the Orontes, Antioch on the Euphrates and Mygdonian Antioch, we see that two of them are more commonly associated with other names: Zeugma and Nisibis. Edessa may have been a rarely used ceremonial or honorific name, replaced by, or supplementing, Heirapolis.

On the other hand, there is already clear evidence of carelessness in Strabo's description of the city. While Pliny and Ptolemy correctly locate the site in Cyrrestice, west of the Euphrates, Strabo places it on different sides of the river in two separate passages: this one describing Mesopotamia in which he seems to place the city to the east of the Euphrates, in fact, in the direction of the famous Edessa, and also in his description of Syria where he places Bambyke west of the Euphrates near Cyrrestice and calls it a small town (πολίχνη).⁸⁷ In his description of Mesopotamia, Strabo may have conflated the descriptions of Bambyke and Edessa which he found in his source for the trade route, placing the conflated description at Edessa but describing Bambyke.

The last community Strabo names is Skenai, which he places 18 *schoinoi* from Seleucia on the Tigris (διέχουσι δὲ τῆς Σελευκείας αἱ Σκηναὶ σχοίνους ὀκτωκαίδεκα). Strabo calls Skenai a notable city (ἀξιολόγου πόλεως) and locates it on a canal (ἐπὶ τινος διώρυγος ἰδρυμένης).⁸⁸ The name Skenai is not known from any other source, but Sarre and Herzfeld suggest that is a corruption of a

84 Ross (2001) 16; Cohen (2006) 173, 177; Syme (1995) 107–8; Tcherikover (1927); Benzinger, *RE* 'Bambyke'; Honigmann, *RE Suppl.* 'Hierapolis'.

85 Brodersen (1989) 152 n. 2.

86 Ross (2001) 85–90, 109.

87 Strabo 16.2.7: "πρὸς ἔω δ' ὁ Εὐφράτης ἐστὶ καὶ ἡ Βαμβύκη καὶ ἡ Βέροια καὶ ἡ Ἡράκλεια τῇ Ἀντιοχείᾳ, πολίχνηα τυραννοῦμένα ποτε ὑπὸ Διονυσίου τοῦ Ἡρακλέωνος" (To the east of Antiocheia are the Euphrates, and also Bambyke and Beroea and Heracleia, small towns once ruled by the tyrant Dionysius, the son of Heracleon). Bambyke was a polis with a boule and a demos in the Hellenistic period, Cohen (2006) 173.

88 Strabo 16.1.27: "διαβάντων δὲ ἡ ὁδὸς ἐστὶ διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου ἐπὶ τοὺς τῆς Βαβυλωνίας ὁρους μέχρι Σκηνῶν, ἀξιολόγου πόλεως..." (... for after they cross the river, the road runs through

city recorded by Stephanus of Byzantium: Maschane (Μασχάνη), a city of the Skenitai Arabs.⁸⁹ This important Babylonian city on the Euphrates at the inflow of Naarmalcha canal seems to have never received a consistent transliteration in Greek or Latin and is known variously as Besechana, Macepracta, and, in the Greek text of a Sasanian inscription, Misiche.⁹⁰ It is understandable that confusion about the name of this city could occur in the commercial context of Strabo's description. In Greek, σκηναί are booths from which goods are sold; it would be natural to expect this association when reporting or copying the details of the southern terminus of a merchant route.⁹¹

1.7 *Strabo's Narrative*

Strabo gives a clear picture of the Romano-Iranian borderland from the perspective of Roman Syria. Although his overall narrative moves from east to west, a predominantly Mediterranean perspective is evident, particularly in the specificity of the information regarding Syria and the proliferation of Greek names and cultural impositions on the landscape of the region. Strabo's information about οἱ Ἀσσύριοι is more precise in Syria and less so the further the space is from the Mediterranean.

In his description of Syria, Strabo proceeds according to his usual method of giving a general description of a space followed by a narrower, closer examination of sub-divisions within that space. This gives a coherent structure to Strabo's work by establishing a geographical context and framework for his narrative. These broad and narrow spatial divisions need not have the same basis. Strabo's "Syria" is a geographical region and a Roman administrative category, while its sub-divisions are defined by a mix of geographic, political, and cultural boundaries. This is also evident in the case of Mesopotamia.

In Chapter 3, we saw how Strabo's first description of the Fertile Crescent (οἱ Ἀσσύριοι) at the start of book 16 was initially defined by the presence of named population groups. Those groups were placed in a spatial context framed by the topological relationship between the space and the geophysical

the desert to Skenai, a noteworthy city situated on a canal towards the borders of Babylonia ...").

89 Sarre and Herzfeld (1911) 1.227–228; Weissbach "Σκηναί", *RE* Series 2, 5.470. Steph. Byz. s.v. Μασχάνη, "πόλις πρὸς τῶν Σκηνιτῶν Ἀράβων. Κουάδρατος ὁγδόῃ Παρθικῶν. τὸ ἐθνικὸν Μασχανεύς" (Meineke 437).

90 Isidore (1) calls it Besechana and places it 31 *schoinoi* from the Naarmalcha canal. In his commemorative inscription at Naqš-i Rostam, Shapur calls it Misiche: škz (*Res Gestae Divi Saporis*) 4–5, 9–10 (Greek text with French translation: Maricq (1958); the main edition is Huyse (1999)); Gawlikowski (2007) 131. Ammianus calls it Macepracta: Amm. Marc. 24.2.6.

91 This route is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

features which enclose it. Strabo delimits the boundaries of Mesopotamia primarily according to geographical features: the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers and the Taurus Mountains. When he returns to treat the area of the “tribes of Mesopotamia around Nisibis”, his approach focuses on fixed elements of the landscape, both geophysical features and constructed urban settlements. When he divides Mesopotamia into smaller units, he locates those units by reference to geographical features: Mygdonia is near the mountains and the Euphrates (ἡ παρόρειος), Gordyene is near the Tigris (Πρὸς τῇ Τύγρει), and the southern parts are defined by their relationship to the desert. Although most of the urban sites in Mesopotamia are not topologically located, those that are defined in this way are defined by their topological relationship to geographic features: Nisibis is under Mount Masius (ὑπὸ τῷ Μασίῳ ὄρει) and Anthemusia, Bambyke and Skenai are all located relative to nearby rivers or canals. These topological relationships also give the work a greater sense of two-dimensionality.

2 Pliny the Elder

While Strabo's understanding of planar topology is evident in his geographical descriptions, topographic accuracy was not Pliny's primary concern. Pliny used geographical categories and features to frame and locate certain parts of his narrative, but most of the topological relationships between geographical features of the Mesopotamian Borderland are linear. However, what appear to be topologically linear descriptions of space are, in fact, atopolological lists. This is particularly evident in his description of Syria.

Pliny's account of the space of ancient Syria is quite geographically coherent. In the *Natural History*, networks of water provide structure for description of bodies of land.⁹² The geographic books are organised according to the *periplus* genre of coastal voyages, and the core of his geography may have come from one such source.⁹³ Throughout his work, the narrative constantly and explicitly

92 Murphy (2004) 135–36.

93 Nicolet (1991) 173–74. However, note Woolf on Pliny's deliberate choice to shape a periplus from source narratives in a variety of styles, Woolf (2011) 11. That Pliny structures his geographical narrative on a periplus around the Mediterranean quickly becomes clear as one reads his work. He begins with a description of the coast of Europe as comprising four gulfs (Pliny *NH* 3.1.). At a closer scale this is particularly clear in his account of the Peloponnese in which lists of sites are grouped according to the bays to which they are closest (see especially 4.16–19 on the *sinus Laconicus*, *sinus Argolicus*, and *sinus Saronicus*).

returns to the coast or to rivers.⁹⁴ Accordingly, in his description of Syria, his narrative moves up the coast and then down the Euphrates, with occasional diversions into the interior regions as he proceeds. He begins this narrative trail at Pelusium where he left his account of Egypt and proceeds up the coast with diversions to describe the inland areas of Judaea, Phoenicia and Syria.⁹⁵ After reaching the north end of the Levantine coast, he lists a number of interior cities between Antioch and the Euphrates.⁹⁶ This is followed by a description of the course of the Euphrates and the adjacent regions of Commagane and Osrhoene.⁹⁷ Where the Euphrates bends east at Sura, Pliny's narrative leaves the river to describe Palmyra and other desert cities in southern Syria before returning to the Euphrates to complete the river's course to the salt-marshes at the head of the Persian Gulf.⁹⁸

This largely linear approach gives structure to Pliny's geographical narrative, but does not limit it. As mentioned above, Pliny diverges from his *periplus* style to describe areas not obviously tied to a route, but these descriptions are somewhat list-like and geographically disconnected and remain so until Pliny's narrative can return to the safety of a shoreline. At times the narrative makes no attempt at relative spatial arrangement and instead orders space according to other criteria; for example, in his inland description linking the coast with the Euphrates, Pliny lists cities of the interior without topological links:

Let the interior now be described. Coele Syria has Apamea, separated from the tetrarchy of the Nazerini by the river Maysa, Bambyce (which is also called Hierapolis, and in fact Mabog by the Syrians – here the monstrous Atargatis is worshipped, called Derceto by the Greeks), Chalcis, named On the Belus, from which the very fertile region of Syria, Chalcidene, is named, and then Cyrrus of Cyrrestica, the Gazetae, Gindareni, Gabeni and the two tetrarchies called Granucomatitae, the Hemeseni, Hylatae, the tribe of Ituraei (and one branch called the Baethaemi), the Mariamnitan, [82] the tetrarchy called Mammisea, Paradisum, Pagrae, Penelenitae, two Seleucias (beyond that already mentioned), one called “on the Euphrates” the other “on the Belus”, and the Tardytsenses. The rest of Syria, except for the parts to be addressed with the Euphrates, has the Arethusii, the Beroeenses, the Epiphanenses on the Orontes, the

94 A few examples: Pliny *NH* 4.81–88; 5.66, 68, 75; 6.77–8.

95 Pliny *NH* 68–79.

96 Pliny *NH* 81–2.

97 Pliny, *NH*, 5.88–90.

98 Pliny, *NH*, 5.86–7.

Laodiceans (called “on Lebanon”), the Leucadii, the Larisaeos, and seventeen more tetrarchies with barbarian names divided into kingdoms.⁹⁹

Although the narrative disguises the fact with parenthetical notes about some of the locations mentioned, it is clear that Pliny is working from two alphabetical lists of locations and tribes, one for Coele Syria (“Coele habet ... Tardytenses”) and another for the rest of Syria (“reliquam autem Syria habet ... barbaris nominibus xvii”). However, these two lists do not cover distinct geographical areas (as Map 4.5 shows). Rather, the second list (*reliqua Syria*) is a list of ethnic descriptors, while the first comprises mostly cities. Jones proposed that Pliny used an official list of Syrian peoples which he combined with the places mentioned by his literary sources as belonging in Coele Syria to compose his first alphabetised list; his second list comprised the remaining peoples from that official list.¹⁰⁰

After describing the inland parts of northern Syria, Pliny transitions to a description of the course of the Euphrates. He begins at its source in Armenia and proceeds downstream to the marshes of Babylonia, with a short digression to present Palmyra. It is in the course of this description that Pliny treats several cities of *reliqua Syria* that he previously omitted from that list.¹⁰¹ I will discuss Pliny’s narrative under four sections, describing in turn the delimitations, denominations and topological relationships of northwest Mesopotamia, Commagene, the cities and people along the Euphrates, and Palmyra.

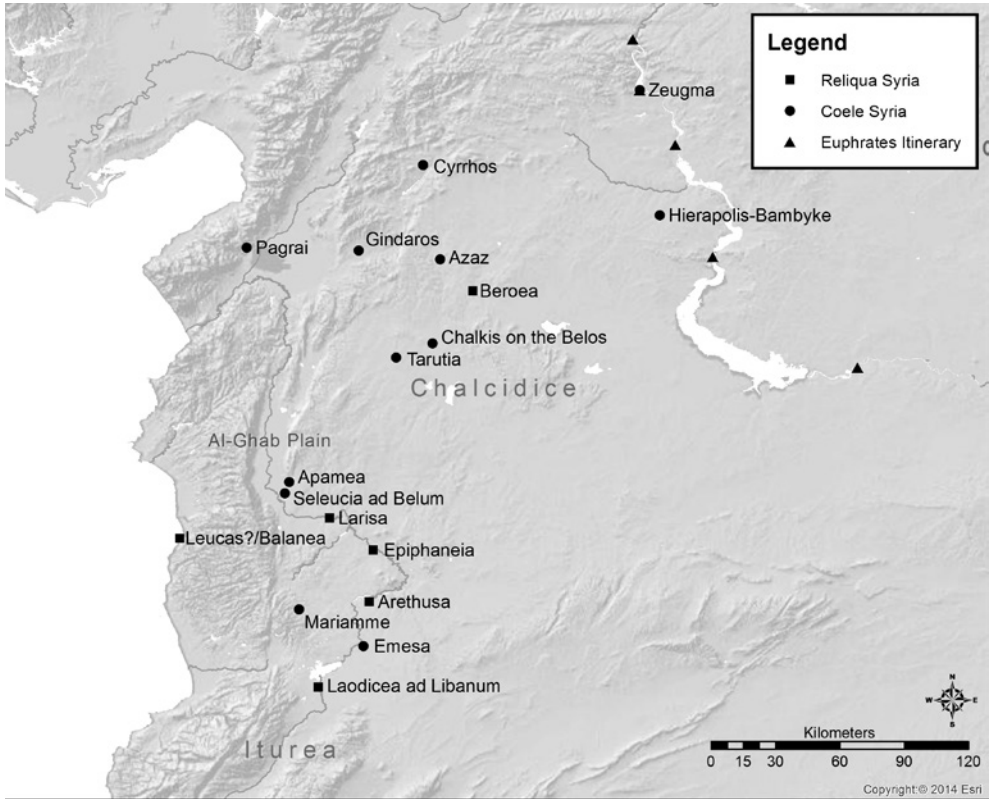
2.1 Northwest Mesopotamia

I conceptualise Pliny’s description of the Mesopotamian Borderland in book 5 as divided into four parts. For convenience, I will refer to the first of these parts as northwest Mesopotamia, for reasons which I explain shortly, but it should

99 Pliny, *NH*, 5.81–82: “Nunc interiora dicantur. Coele habet Apameam, Marsya amne divisam a Nazerinorum tetrarchia, Bambycen, quae alio nomine Hierapolis vocatur, Syris vero Mabog – ibi prodigiosa Atargatis, Graecis autem Derceto dicta, colitur –, Chalcidem cognominatam Ad Belum, unde regio Chalcidena fertilissima Syriae, et inde Cysreticae Cyrrum, Gazetas, Gindarenos, Gabenos, tetrarchias duas quae Granucomatitae vocantur, Hemesenos, Hylatas, Ituraeorum gentem et qui ex his Baethaemi vocantur, Mariamnitanos, [82] tetrarchiam quae Mammisea appellatur, Paradisum, Pagras, Penelenitas, Seleucias praeter iam dictam duas, quae Ad Euphraten et quae Ad Belum vocantur, Tardytenses. reliqua autem Syria habet, exceptis quae cum Euphrate dicentur, Arethusios, Beroeenses, Epiphanenses ad Orontem, Laodiceos, qui Ad Libanum cognominantur, Leucadios, Larisaeos, praeter tetrarchias in regna discriptas barbaris nominibus xvii.”

100 Jones (1971) 260–63.

101 Pliny *NH* 5.82: “reliqua autem Syria habet, exceptis quae cum Euphrate dicentur”.



MAP 4.5 Pliny's Syria

be noted that the analytical category is mine, not Pliny's. Pliny's description of this area refers to three entities: Orroeon (Osrhoene), the *praefectura Mesopotamiae*, and the Praetavi Arabs.¹⁰² What entities these terms reflect is unclear, but while they seem to include the entire fertile shelf of northern Mesopotamia, the topological clues which Pliny provides show that his focus is on the western part of northern Mesopotamia, west of the Balikh River, thus, northwest Mesopotamia.

Pliny begins his narrative itinerary along the Euphrates with a digression inland to describe the regional topology of northwest Mesopotamia:

¹⁰² The *praefectura Mesopotamiae* was discussed in Chapter 3.

By a distance of three *schoinoi*, the Euphrates separates the region of Arabia called Osrhoene on the left and Commagene on the right, and allows a bridge, even where it smashes out of the Taurus.¹⁰³

“Orroeon” transliterates a Greek genitive plural which in turn transliterates the Syriac name for Edessa, ܐܪܗܝ (’WRHY, Orhai), thus the space commonly referred to as Osrhoene.¹⁰⁴ In the geographical context of the downstream journey on the Euphrates, this description is quite accurate: Osrhoene (one of several regions called Arabia in antiquity)¹⁰⁵ is to the left of the Euphrates and Commagene is to the right. The implication of the text is that the two regions faced each other across the river, as they did in reality. However, the narrative context of the passage undercuts the geographical accuracy of this description.

This passage seems to be interposed amidst a description of the course of the Euphrates through the Taurus. Preceding this passage, Pliny had described the course of the Euphrates through Armenia; here he appears to begin a description of the Euphrates south of the Taurus, but suddenly skips back through the range to describe the eastward turn of the Euphrates at Claudiopoli in Cappadocia and the violent passage of the river through the mountains:

At Claudiopoli in Cappadocia [the Euphrates] turns its course to the west. There, the Taurus redirects the river for the first time in this conflict and despite being conquered and cut in half it wins in another way and expels it, broken, to the south. Thus this struggle of nature is a draw, the river breaking through as it wished, but the mountain stopping its desired course.¹⁰⁶

Pliny’s attention to Roman power and its display is evident in his treatment of the passage of the Euphrates through the Taurus range. This passage interrupts the geographical flow of the narrative and dislocates the reader from the area of Samosata to southern Cappadocia, before the narrative continues down the river. The evocative martial language of the brief digression (*pugna, victus, vincit, fractum, expellit*) is heralded, and perhaps inspired, by Pliny’s use

103 Pliny *NH* 5.85: “Arabiam inde laeva, Orroeon dictam regionem, trischoena mensura, dextraque Commagenen disternat, pontis tamen, etiam ubi Taurum expugnat, patiens.”

104 Millar (1993) 456.

105 Shahîd (1984) 3–5, 7–9 discusses the various areas called “Arabia.”

106 Pliny *NH* 5.85: “apud Claudiopoli in Cappadociae cursum ad occasum solis agit. primo hunc illic in pugna Taurus aufert victusque et abscisus sibimet alio modo vincit ac fractum expellit in meridiem. ita naturae dimicatio illa aequatur, hoc eunte quo vult, illo prohibente ire qua vellet.”

of *expugnat* for the emergence of the Euphrates from the mountains. This kind of digression is common in Pliny. Murphy has argued that Pliny's loose sentence structure and digressive narrative are an aesthetic choice.¹⁰⁷ Pliny's text contains frequent asides mentioning his concern to discuss famous and interesting locations and has a sense of playfulness and intricacy that livens what could be a rather dull progression of facts. This kind of digression acted as a demonstration of Pliny's literary skills. Murphy discusses the martial language which surrounds and frames this passage in the context of the eternal battle between rivers and mountains that plays out throughout Pliny's work.¹⁰⁸ This timeless, amphitheatrical spectacle in which two anonymised combatants play out their respective roles for the pleasure of the dominating gaze of the elite Roman audience falls within the realm of a literary aesthetic focused on placing the world in relation to its Roman masters. The poetic language of this descriptive passage and the casual rearrangement of the spaces' geographical order serves as a warning that Pliny placed a low priority on accurate topology.

The essential structure of Pliny's description of Mesopotamia is a simple set of lists largely unconcerned with topological specificity at the local level.¹⁰⁹ Having introduced "Arabia" (Osrhoene), Pliny diverges from the river to describe the regions of Mesopotamia:

Arabia, above mentioned, has the towns of Edessa, formerly called Antiochia; Callirhoë, named from its fountain; and Carrhæ, famous for the defeat of Crassus. Adjoining to this is the praefecture of Mesopotamia, which derives its origin from the Assyrians, and in which are the towns of Anthemusia and Nicephorium. Next are the Arabians, called Praetavi whose capital is Singara.¹¹⁰

Pliny's description works on two scales: at the broader scale three categories of space are placed in topological relation to each other: the *praefectura*

¹⁰⁷ Murphy (2004) 29–40.

¹⁰⁸ Murphy (2004) 148–51. French (1994) 202–3 also discusses theatricality in Pliny.

¹⁰⁹ In the introduction to his geographical section, Pliny (*NH* 3.1–2) describes how he will go about constructing his geography: "Locorum nuda nomina et quanta dabitur brevitae ponentur, claritate causisque dilatis in suas partes; nunc enim sermo de toto est." (The bare names of places will be set down, and with the greatest brevity available, their celebrity and its reasons being deferred to the proper sections; for my topic now is the world as a whole.) This passage is discussed in Chapter 5.

¹¹⁰ Pliny *NH* 5.86: "Arabia supra dicta habet oppida Edessam, quae quondam Antiochia dicebatur, Callirhoem, a fonte nominatam, Carrhas, Crassi clade nobile. iungitur praefectura Mesopotamiae, ab Assyriis originem trahens, in qua Anthemusia et Nicephorium oppida. mox Arabes qui Praetavi vocantur; horum caput Singara."

Mesopotamia is joined (*iungitur*) to Arabia (Osrhoene) and thereafter (in the form of a list, using *mox*) come the Praetavi Arabs (*Arabes qui Praetavi vocantur*). It is unlikely that this list reflects an intra-urban itinerary across northern Mesopotamia; a route passing in order through Edessa, Carrhae, Anthemusia, Nikephorion, and Singara would have been a very circuitous route (see Map 4.6). At the closer scale, within those topologically specified regions, Pliny lists the important settlements of those spaces without relational cues. The narrative structure is well disguised with descriptive asides, but is fundamentally a series of lists of people and places organised by regions: Osrhoene contains the *oppida* Edessa, Callirhoe, and Carrhae; Mesopotamia contains Anthemusia and Nicephorium; the land of the Praetavi Arabs contains Singara. This pattern of topologically located regions with listed contents is evident throughout Pliny's geographical narrative.¹¹¹

The previous chapter discussed the difficulty of understanding Pliny's *praefectura Mesopotamiae* at length. How does the space fit within Pliny's narrative structure? Like most of the spaces Pliny describes, it is presented as part of a list of unknown spatial configuration. It is preceded on the list by Osrhoene (just east of the Euphrates) and followed by a group (the Praetavi Arabs) located around Singara. Yet, the two *oppida* which Pliny locates within the space of the *praefectura Mesopotamiae* (Anthemusia and Nicephorium) are not located between Osrhoene and Singara, but to the west and south of Osrhoene respectively (Map 4.6).

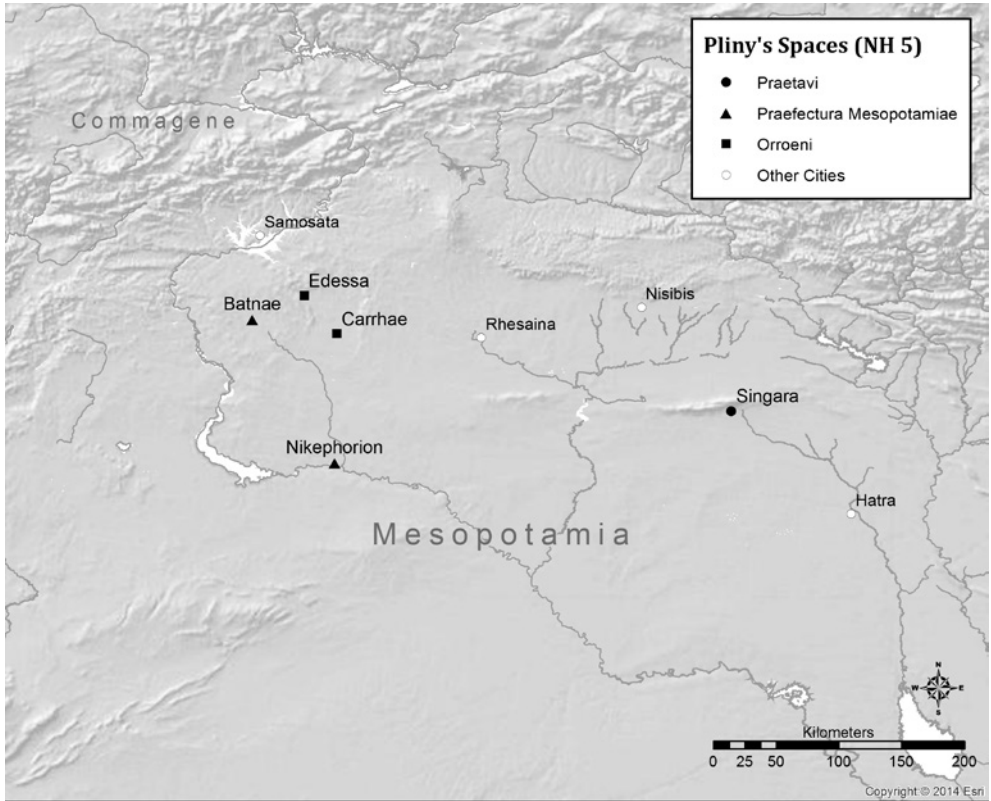
The final division in this part of Pliny's narrative are the *Arabes qui Praetavi vocantur* with their lands around Singara.¹¹² This location is all we can say about the Praetavi who are otherwise unknown.¹¹³

Thus, Pliny's description of the trans-Euphrates area in book 5 presents the space as containing two Arab ethnic units centred on cities and a *praefectura*

111 Some examples from his description of Syria: the coastal cities of Palestina are described as a *periplus* and interior cities as a list (5.68–70); Pliny specifies the location of the Decapolis within Syria and relative to Judaea, then describes the polities within it as lists (5.74); the coast of Phoenicia is described as a *periplus* with a brief topological aside to describe the relationship between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges, Phoenicia, Palestina and the Decapolis (5.75–8). Examples from the rest of his geographical books abound, see, for example, his passages on Spain (*NH* 3.6–30).

112 The site of Singara (modern Sinğar) lies on the southern slopes of the Jebel Sinjar, south of Nisibis, where winter rains make agriculture possible for some of the year Oates (1968) 97; Lloyd (1938) 123–24; a brief description of the condition of the site in the 1930s can be found at Reitlinger (1938) 151.

113 Retsö (2003) 415, 521 suggests that the *-tav-* element of their name may indicate a relationship to *taienoi* which became a general term for people of the Syrian desert and close to Adiabene in the third century CE. Pliny does not mention Hatra, but it may have been within the sphere of the Praetavi, Retsö (2003) 440.



MAP 4.6 Mesopotamian sites in Pliny NH 5

with no ethnic description. The territory of the Orroeni around Edessa and the Praetavi around Singara lie within a region broadly administered in some relationship to a Parthian administration (*praefectura*) of Mesopotamia as a whole. In Pliny's time, the Abgarid dynasty of Edessa was a political entity within the Parthian system, but is that what Pliny is describing here?

The space Pliny calls Orroenian Arabia lies on the east bank of the Euphrates. It could be described as opposite Commagene and contained the *oppida* of Edessa and Carrhae. This last note, the assignation of Carrhae to the territory of Orroenian Arabia, has been disputed. Ross questions Pliny's value for establishing the limits of Osrhoene, not only on the basis of the inclusion of Carrhae in book 5, but on the description of the Tigris in book 6 as separating the Orroei from the Adiabenii.¹¹⁴ It is extremely unlikely that the territory of the Abgarid

¹¹⁴ Ross (2001) 22–23. Pliny, *NH* 5.86; 6.129: "Tigris autem ex Armenia acceptis fluminibus claris Parthenia ac Nicephorione Arabas Orroeos Adiabenosque distermians et quam diximus Mesopotamiam faciens...." (However, once the notable rivers flowing from

kings extended to the Tigris opposite Adiabene. Such a swathe would encompass the territories of several other northern Mesopotamian cities, including Nisibis, Rhesaina and Singara. Ross concludes that Pliny has confused the inhabitants of Osrhoene with the other sedentary Arab peoples of the region.

However, this may be a misunderstanding of Pliny's text. It is begging the question to ask if Pliny is correct to assign Carrhae to the territory of the Orroeni when Pliny's description does not attribute a political status to "Arabiam inde laeva, Orroeon dictam regionem". Pliny uses no political terminology in these descriptions. Just as Strabo refers broadly to all of the settled plain of northern Mesopotamia as the land of the Mygdonian Arabs, so Pliny attributes a broad area of northern Mesopotamia to Orroenian Arabs. When Pliny describes the extent of Greater Armenia in book 6, he refers to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers as delimiting Mesopotamia and the *Arabes Orroei* as occupying it: "[Mesopotamia] interest ibi tenent Arabes Orroei".¹¹⁵ Pliny may well have confused the inhabitants of Osrhoene with the other sedentary Arab peoples of the region as Ross argues, but his mistake is not necessarily one of misattributing territory to the Abgarid dynasty of Edessa, but of using an ethnic term to apply to a collection of neighbouring units which might more accurately be described by different ethnic terms, as Strabo may have done in his description of Mygdonia and the Mygdones. If this is the case, the different name in the two authors may show a shift in priority from a view of Mesopotamia centred on Nisibis to one centred on Edessa, that is, from the broader region of Mesopotamia generally to the immediate border region of Osrhoene on the banks of the Euphrates. This perspective would fit with the recent annexation of Commagene which pushed Roman direct control as far as the Euphrates and made Osrhoene an immediate neighbour of Roman space. Pliny certainly focuses on the western edge of the Mesopotamian Borderland in this section; Singara is the only site he mentions that lies east of the Balikh River (see Map 4.6).

Armenia, the Parthenias and Nicephorion, have been received, the Tigris divides the Orroei Arabs from the Adiabeni Arabs and creates Mesopotamia, which we mentioned above ...).

- 115 Pliny *NH* 6.25: "Armenia autem Maior incipit a Parihedris montibus, Euphrate amne, ut dictum est, aufertur Cappadociae et, qua discedit Euphrates, Mesopotamiae haut minus claro amne Tigri. Utrumque fundit ipsa, et initium Mesopotamiae facit inter duos amnes sitae; quod interest ibi tenent Arabes Orroei." (Greater Armenia begins at the Parihedri Mountains, and is separated from Cappadocia, as we have said, by the Euphrates and, when the Euphrates turns aside, from Mesopotamia by the equally famous river Tigris. Both rivers rise in Armenia, and it forms the beginning of Mesopotamia, the tract of country lying between those two rivers; the intervening space is occupied by the Orroean Arabs.) Loeb trans.

2.2 Commagene

After dealing with Mesopotamia in this way, Pliny's description of Commagene immediately following is relatively specific. This is the second part of his description of the Mesopotamian Borderland. He jumps abruptly from his sentence on the Praetavi Arabs back to the Euphrates at Samosata:

Below Samosata, on the side of Syria, the river Marsyas flows into the Euphrates. Cingilla ends the territory of Commagene, and the city of the Immei begins. The towns Epiphania and Antiochia are washed by the river and are both known as Epiphania and Antiochia on the Euphrates; also Zeugma, seventy-two miles from Samosata, is famous for the passage there across the Euphrates. Seleucus, the founder of both cities, united Zeugma and Apamea on the opposite bank by a bridge. [87] The people on the edge of Mesopotamia are called Rhoali. In Syria is the town Europus, once Thapsacus, now Amphipolis; and Skenitai Arabs. The river flows to a place called Sura where it turns to the east and leaves the Palmyrene desert of Syria. That desert continues as far as the city of Petra and the region of Arabia called Felix.¹¹⁶

Pliny identifies the border of Commagene, along with other *oppida* along the river, including the twin-cities of Zeugma (Seleucia on the Euphrates) and Apamea, which he locates relative to the capital. However, this is something of a literary rearrangement of a Euphrates *periplus* rather than a truly topological description of Commagene.¹¹⁷ Supported by the grammar and the content, Pliny's narrative follows the river south from the Taurus. Grammatically, the passage comprises a list governed by verbs of connection (*influit, finit, incipit, iunxerat, fertur usque*), the main form of conjunctive grammar used.¹¹⁸ The places described by Pliny are mostly points on the Euphrates comprising either a site (cities and towns) or the intersection of routes, rivers and

116 Pliny *NH* 5.86–87: “a Samosatis autem latere Syriae Marsyas amnis influit. Cingilla Commagenen finit, Imeneorum civitas incipit. oppida adluuntur Epiphania et Antiochia, quae Ad Euphraten vocantur, item Zeugma LXXII [m.]p. a Samosatis, transitu Euphratis nobile. ex adverso Apameam Seleucus, idem utriusque conditor, ponte iunxerat. [87] qui cohaerent Mesopotamiae, Rhoali vocantur. at in Syria oppida Europum, Thapsacum quondam, nunc Amphipolis; Arabes Scenitae. ita fertur usque Suram locum, in quo conversus ad orientem relinquit Syriae Palmyrenas solitudines, quae usque ad Petram urbem et regionem Arabiae Felicis appellatae pertinent.”

117 The same could be said of the specificity of the places mentioned in Pliny's description of the Jordan valley (5.71–73).

118 Stylistically, Pliny connects the sentences and clauses of the passage sparsely with those verbal connections and little else. At times the passage becomes a simple list.

territorial boundaries. Sites include the inflow of the Marsyas *amnis* and the *oppida* Epiphania, Antiochia, Zeugma (also described as an intersection, *transitu Euphratis nobile*) and Europus-Thapsacus-Amhipolis. Intersections include the crossing at Zeugma and the boundary of the *Imeneorum civitas* on the Euphrates. Except for the boundary of *Imeneorum civitas*, the topology of area features is usually very indistinctly described, in particular those areas inhabited by the Rhoali and Arab Skenitai. Pliny's riverine *periplus* continues south along the Euphrates, with a digression on the desert cities.

Beyond locating it in the region, Pliny devotes little attention to Commagene in his narrative. He places the kingdom within Syria in his initial description of the latter space, then on the Euphrates opposite Osrhoene on his description of the river.¹¹⁹ In his description of inland north Syria, he mentions none of the Commagenean cities.¹²⁰ The passage above is the most detailed: "a Samosatis autem latere Syriae Marsyas amnis influit. Cingilla Commagenen finit, Imeneorum civitas incipit." Aside from the reference to the Commagenean capital Samosata, Pliny's account is quite obscure. The Marsyas river has been identified as the Merzumen Su, a major western tributary of the Euphrates that enters that river at Rumkale between Zeugma and Samosata (Rumkale is marked on Map 4.7); Pliny is the only author to mention it.¹²¹ Pliny is also the only author to mention Cingilla, which he places at the limit of Commagene. Given that Pliny is describing the course of the Euphrates from its source, the logic of his narrative should place Cingilla on the Euphrates at the southern boundary of Commagene.¹²² Pliny is likewise the only ancient source to mention the *civitas Imeneorum*.¹²³ Pliny is usually clear to mention tribal units that he considers Arabs, whether more pastoralist (Skenitai) or settled (as the Praetavi and Orroeni seem to be).¹²⁴ This *civitas* is probably to be understood as a collection of small villages with some sort of unitary political structure, analogous to the other ethnic units described as such in northern Syria.¹²⁵

119 In Syria: Pliny *NH* 5.66. Opposite Osrhoene: Pliny *NH* 5.85.

120 Pliny *NH* 5.81–82.

121 Kennedy (1998d) 148, 151; Comfort et al. (2000) 117. Not to be confused with Massyas, the Bekaa valley in Lebanon. Xenophon mentions a river called Maskas ("τὸν Μάσκαν ποταμόν," *Anab.* 1.5.4), but this is further south, in the desert region between Thapsacus and Babylonia.

122 However, note Pliny's willingness to alter his topological sequence for rhetorical effect.

123 On the territorial limits of a *civitas*, see Roux (1994).

124 That Pliny draws a distinction between settled and pastoralist Arabs is clear from *NH* 6.143–44 where the Skenitai are specifically noted as wandering (*vagi*) and the Nabataeans inhabit a town ("Nabataei oppidum incolunt Petram nomine ..."), Ross (2001) 23.

125 Ando examines Strabo's treatment of the social, cultural and legal status of a *civitas* in Ando (2012).

2.3 *The Euphrates*

The third part of the Mesopotamian Borderland which Pliny describes consists of a series of cities and peoples downstream from Commagene:

The towns Epiphania and Antiochia are washed by the river and are both known as Epiphania and Antiochia on the Euphrates; also Zeugma, seventy-two miles from Samosata, is famous for the passage there across the Euphrates. Seleucus, the founder of both cities, united Zeugma and Apamea on the opposite bank by a bridge.¹²⁶

The latter two of these are well known, Zeugma (Seleucia) on the west bank of the Euphrates and Apamea on the east.¹²⁷ A few sections before, Pliny had referred to Zeugma as Seleucia on the Euphrates (*NH* 5.82) without noting their correspondence.¹²⁸ Kennedy argues that this is evidence of interchangeable use of the two names, and while that may be the case, it is not clear that Pliny realised that he was doing so. More likely he was simply following the names provided by his sources.

The first two cities mentioned by Pliny are more difficult. The locations of Antioch ad Euphraten and Epiphaneia ad Euphraten are unknown.¹²⁹ Neither city is mentioned by any other literary sources, although coins of the second century CE survive from Antioch ad Euphraten. Grainger suggests that the two cities were another pair of twin cities on either side of a Euphrates crossing founded as such by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.¹³⁰ The site of Europus on the Euphrates has not been securely identified. Carchemish is the most likely location, but its location on the modern border between Syria and Turkey has hindered archaeological exploration of the site.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Pliny *NH* 5.86: "... oppida adluuntur Epiphania et Antiochia, quae Ad Euphraten vocantur, item Zeugma LXXII [m.] p. a Samosatis, transitu Euphratis nobile. ex adverso Apameam Seleucus, idem utriusque conditor, ponte iunxerat."

¹²⁷ Cohen (2006) 190–96.

¹²⁸ Cohen reports that the identification of the town of Zeugma with Seleucia ad Euphraten (*NH* 5.82) was confirmed by a dedicatory inscription of the late second or early third century by a decurion from *Seleuciae Zeugmae*, Cohen (2006) 190. The inscription, a dedication to Jupiter Dolichenus, a cult derived from an ancient sanctuary at Doliche in Commagene, was found in Pannonia at Brigetio (modern Ószöny), the location of one of several European cult sites (called *Dolichena*): Hörig and Schwertheim (1987) 155–156 no. 236; finds: nos. 237–261 (perhaps no. 262).

¹²⁹ Antioch on the Euphrates: Cohen (2006) 151–52. Epiphaneia on the Euphrates: Cohen (2006) 169.

¹³⁰ Grainger (1990) 138.

¹³¹ Charchemish is also one of the most likely sites for Thapsacus, see above.

Amongst these cities, Pliny notes two other groups. The first is a people called “Rhoali”, who dwell next to Mesopotamia.¹³² They are not mentioned elsewhere and Pliny gives no further information.¹³³ Retsö characterises Dillemann’s suggestion that Rhoali could be a distortion of Osrhoeni as a guess.¹³⁴ The second group mentioned by Pliny are the Arab Skenitai who are mentioned in the grammatically confused passage discussed above: “at in Syria oppida Europum, Thapsacum quondam, nunc Amphipolis; Arabes Scenitae.”¹³⁵ From the known sites in Pliny’s narrative, the narrative logic seems to be a progression of sites following the river downstream. If so, Pliny places the lands of the Skenitai Arabs downstream of the Europus/Thapsacus/Amphipolis group (however that was constituted), and upstream of Sura. Ecologically, this is a likely area for pastoralism. As the Euphrates flows south away from the hills, rain becomes less frequent and thus the land more marginal and less suited to dryland farming.¹³⁶ However, in the passage describing the course of the Euphrates through the Taurus, Pliny demonstrated a willingness to be flexible with the relationship between his narrative and the geographic reality of the spaces he describes. Thus, caution is required, especially as many of the other sites in this section of Pliny’s work have yet to be securely located.

Further down the Euphrates, Pliny’s narrative arrives at Sura just after the river bends to the east.¹³⁷ Pliny is the first to mention this site, which seems to have become more important in late antiquity when it became the site of a legionary base near the northern end of the *Strata Diocletiana*.¹³⁸ After digressing from the Euphrates to discuss the desert cities, Pliny’s narrative returns to the river at Sura and quickly proceeds downstream to Babylonia. In the same way as Strabo, Pliny chooses not to describe the various settlements and stopping points further down the Euphrates that we see in Isidore’s itinerary.¹³⁹ Pliny only mentions Philiscum, an “oppidum Parthorum ad Euphraten”. This

132 Pliny *NH* 5.87: “qui cohaerent Mesopotamiae, Rhoali vocantur.”

133 Weissbach’s entry in Pauly-Wissowa (‘Rhoali’ *RE*) notes the presence of a north Arabian tribe with the name “Ruwala” (Lancaster, W. and Felicity, s.v. *EI*).

134 Dillemann (1962) 77; Retsö (2003) 428 n. 177.

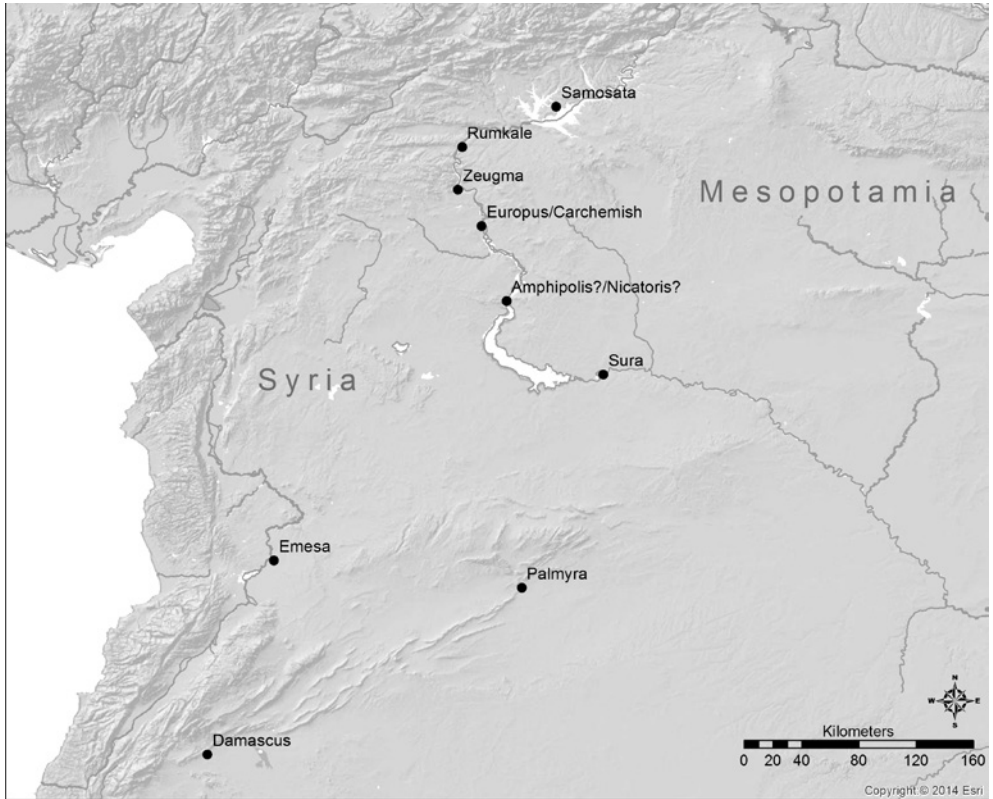
135 Pliny *NH* 5.87.

136 Xenophon calls this area Arabia (“διὰ τῆς Ἀραβίας,” *Anab.* 1.5.1). The Arab Skenitai and nomadic pastoralism are discussed in Chapter 5.

137 Pliny *NH* 5.87: “ita fertur usque Suram locum, in quo conversus ad orientem relinquit Syriae Palmyrenas solitudines, quae usque ad Petram urbem et regionem Arabiae Felicis appellatae pertinent.” Kessler, Karlheinz ‘Sura [3]’ *BNP*. This is a different Sura from the major centre of Babylonian Judaism in southern Babylonia (Ego, Beate, ‘Sura [4]’ *BNP*).

138 Kessler, Karlheinz, ‘Sura’ *BNP*. For more on the military road usually ascribed to Diocletian, see Whittaker (1994) 135–39; Isaac (1990) 163–71; several of the forts of the *Strata Diocletiana* are discussed in Kennedy and Riley (1990).

139 Isidore 1; Strabo 16.1.27.



MAP 4.7 Pliny's Euphrates itinerary

is probably the same place which Isidore calls Phaliga (Φάλιγα).¹⁴⁰ Isidore's narrative treats this site with some importance, claiming that the name means "halfway station" (μεσοπορικόν) in Greek, giving distances measurements to Zeugma and Seleucia on the Tigris. Accordingly, it probably corresponds with the Aramaic name Pelga (Syriac ܡܠܓܐ meaning half or middle) in the vicinity of Circesium.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Isidore 1: "εἴτα Φάλιγα κώμη πρὸς τῷ Εὐφράτῃ (λέγοιτο δ' ἂν Ἑλληνιστὶ μεσοπορικόν), σχοῖνοι ζ. ἀπὸ Ἀντιοχείας ἕως τούτου σχοῖνοι ρκ· ἐντεῦθεν δὲ ἐπὶ Σελεύκειαν τὴν πρὸς τῷ Τίγριδι σχοῖνοι ρ. παράκειται δὲ τῇ Φάλιγα κωμόπολις Ναβραγάθ, καὶ παραρρεῖ αὐτὴν ποταμὸς Ἀβούρας, ὃς ἐμβάλλει εἰς τὸν Εὐφράτην" (Then Phaliga, a village near the Euphrates (it is said to mean "halfway station" in Greek), 6 *schoinoi*. From Antioch to here is 120 *schoinoi*, and then to Seleucia on the Tigris is 100 *schoinoi*. Lying near Phaliga is the small town of Nabagath and flowing nearby is the Abouras River, which goes into the Euphrates.).

¹⁴¹ Pliny *NH* 5.89: "A Sura autem proxime est Philiscum, oppidum Parthorum ad Euphraten. ab eo Seleuciam dierum decem navigatio, totidemque fere Babylonem." (But next from Sura is Philiscum, a Parthian town on the Euphrates. From there it is ten days voyage to Seleucia and just about as many to Babylon.).

2.4 *Palmyra*

The final part of Pliny's sequence centres on Palmyra. This was an important borderland city for which Pliny's testimony is among the few extant literary descriptions. This passage recurs frequently in my analysis of the Mesopotamian Borderland. In this section, I discuss its topographical implications.

At Sura, Pliny digresses from the Euphrates to describe Palmyra and the other cities facing the Syrian desert. These are part of the structure that Jones imagined when he described Syria as two lines of port cities: one on the Mediterranean coast, the other on the edge of the desert.¹⁴² After describing Palmyra itself, Pliny draws the line of desert ports verbally:

On this side of the desert of Palmyra is the Telendena region, and Hierapolis, Beroea and Chalcis, already mentioned. On the other side of Palmyra, Emesa holds some of this desert, as does Elatium, which is half as close to Petra as Damascus.¹⁴³

This description places Palmyra within the context of other important cities on the eastern fringe of Roman control, from Hierapolis in Roman Syria near the border of Commagene, to Petra, capital of the Nabataean kingdom near the far southern extension of the rift valley (Map 4.8: Desert Ports in Pliny).¹⁴⁴

Palmyra is the borderland city which receives the most description in the *Natural History*. Of particular note is the position Pliny assigns the city between Rome and Parthia.

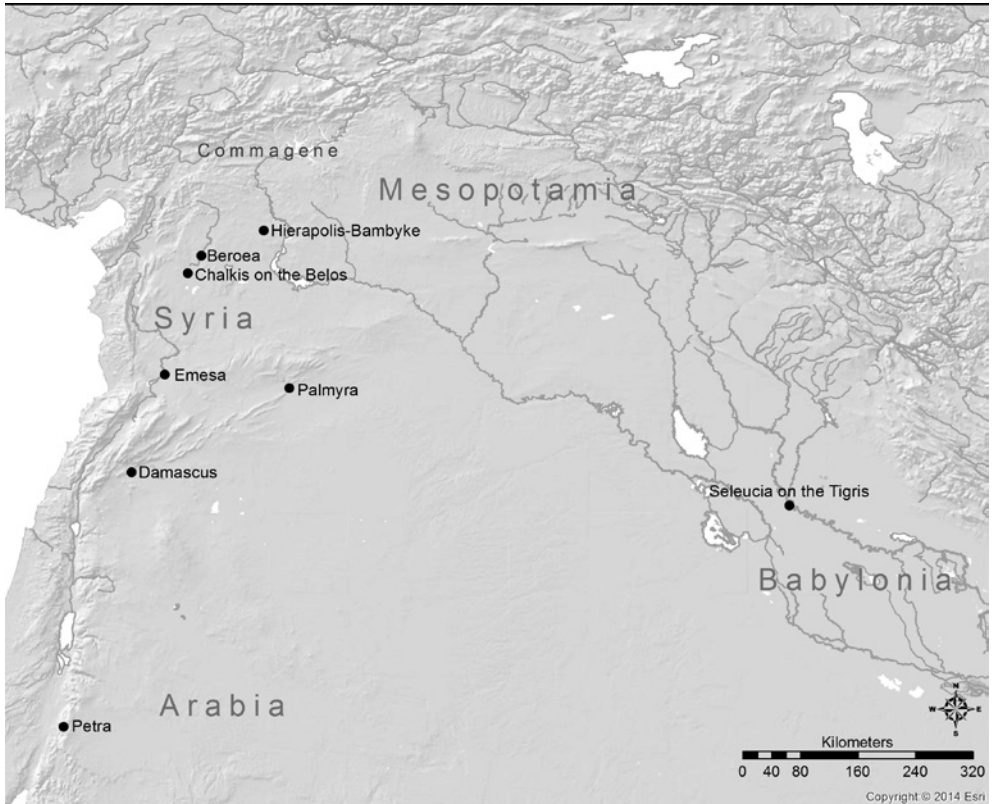
Palmyra is a city famous for its position, the richness of its soil, and the quality of its water, its fields surrounded on all sides by a vast circuit of sand, as if cut off from the world by nature itself, a private lot between two great empires of Rome and Parthia, and at the first sign of discord between them, always a concern to both. It is distant 337 miles from Seleucia of the Parthians, generally known as Seleucia on the Tigris, 203 from the nearest part of the Syrian coast, and 27 less from Damascus.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Jones (1971) 227. This metaphor is common in the literature on the so-called "caravan cities" of the region, Millar (1998).

¹⁴³ Pliny *NH* 5.89: "Infra Palmyrae solitudines Telendena regio dictaeque iam Hierapolis ac Beroae et Chalcis. ultra Palmyram quoque ex solitudinibus his aliquid obtinet Hemesa, item Elatium, dimidio propior Petrae quam Damascus."

¹⁴⁴ The *regio Telendena* is otherwise unknown and cities to the north (Hierapolis, Beroea and Chalcis) have already been discussed. Elatium is also unknown, while Emesa, Damascus and Petra are well known, but beyond my study area.

¹⁴⁵ Pliny *NH* 5.88: "Palmyra urbs nobilis situ, divitiis soli et aquis amoenis, vasto undique ambitu harenis includit agros, ac velut terris exempta a rerum natura, privata sorte inter duo imperia summa Romanorum Parthorumque, et prima in discordia semper utrimque



MAP 4.8 Desert ports in Pliny

Pliny places Palmyra in three ways: topologically and geophysically amidst a “vast circuit of sand”, politically “between two empires”, and mathematically in terms of distances to a number of important points. Several aspects of this passage will be discussed fully in subsequent chapters,¹⁴⁶ but it should be noted now that all three frameworks reflect the actual situation imperfectly and illustrate Pliny’s representation of the space. I will discuss the topological aspects of Pliny’s description here.

Pliny notes the specific local advantages for which Palmyra was renowned: its position and the quality of its soil and water. The latter two were no doubt more remarkable to a Roman audience because of the first. Palmyra was

cura. Abest ab Seleucia Parthorum, quae vocatur Ad Tigrim, CCCXXXVII [m.]p., a proximo vero Syriae litore CCIII et a Damasco XXVII propius.”

146 Palmyra’s murky political and legal relationships to Rome and Parthia will be addressed in Chapter 7. The city’s important role in networks of trade and contact will be examined in Chapter 6.

situated at an oasis in a valley roughly halfway between Damascus and the Euphrates, from which it was well placed to exploit several desert trade routes between Syria and Babylonia.¹⁴⁷ Pliny alludes to that web of trade routes surrounding Palmyra when he gives the location of Palmyra in terms of distances to other important spaces of contact: Seleucia on the Tigris, Damascus, and the Mediterranean (in the form of the Syrian coast, *Syriae litore*). As one might expect, there is some inaccuracy in these figures. The straight-line distance between Seleucia and Palmyra is actually 405 m.p., not 337 m.p., and the distance between Damascus and the coast is 57 m.p. rather than 27 m.p.. The distance from Palmyra to the nearest part of the Syrian coast is 141 m.p., not 203 m.p. as Pliny gives it, but if one travels first to Damascus and then to the nearest part of the coast, the distance is 202 m.p..¹⁴⁸ However, the correspondence of this adjusted measurement is coincidental; Pliny's measurements reflect the reality of human and animal movement over natural terrain, measured in days of travel, then converted into Roman miles, not precise mathematical calculations based on coordinate geometry.¹⁴⁹

2.5 *Pliny's Mesopotamian Lists*

Having crossed the Euphrates to give a description of the northwestern part of Mesopotamia, Pliny delays describing the rest of Mesopotamia until book 6. Whereas book 5 was mostly a description of Roman space, he returns to Mesopotamia as part of a *periplus* around the outside of Asia:

Except for the towns already mentioned, [Mesopotamia] contains Seleucia, Laodicea, Artemita; and in Arabia, the people called the Orroei, and Antiochia of the Mardani, founded by Nicanor, the governor of Mesopotamia, and called Arabis*. [118] Joined to these in the interior are the Eldamari Arabs (beyond whom is the town of Bura near the river Pallaconta) and the Salmani and Masei Arabs. Next to the Gordyaei are the Azoni, through whose territory the river Zerbis runs into the Tigris;

147 The area around Palmyra was considerably more productive and less isolated than Pliny implies (Gawlikowski (1983) 58–59), although the city's rapid growth probably required Palmyra to import food, perhaps from Dura Europus (Dirven (1996) 41–42, 45–46). Smith (2013) provides a detailed examination of Palmyrene history and society. Will (1985) notes that Pliny's description is suspiciously similar to what an oasis *should* look like.

148 The *Peutinger Table* gives the total distance from Palmyra to Damascus as 205 m.p. rather than Pliny's 176 m.p. Mior (2016) shows how the *Peutinger Table* aligns best with a mid-second century CE route rather than the more direct route of the *Strata Diocletiana*.

149 Although the mathematical tools for calculating distances on a coordinate plane were available, Berggren and Jones (2000) 31–41.

next to the Azoni are the Silici, a mountain tribe, and the Orontes, to the west of whom lies the town of Gaugamela, as also Suae among the rocks. Beyond the Silici are the Sitrae through whose district the river Lycus flows out of Armenia, south-east of Sitrae the town of Azochis, then in the plains the towns of Dios Pege (Zeus' Spring), Polytelia, Stratonice, and Anthemus. [119] In the vicinity of the Euphrates is Nikephorion, which we have mentioned; Alexander ordered it to be built because of the favourableness of the site. Apamea at Zeugma has been mentioned also, from which, heading east, one comes to Caphrena, a fortified town, formerly seventy stadia in size and called the "Palace of the Satraps." Tribute used to be brought here; now it is just a fortress. [120] Thebata is still in the same state as formerly, and Oruros, the limit of Roman power under Pompeius Magnus, 250 miles from Zeugma.¹⁵⁰

While Pliny generally organises his narrative of non-Roman Asia according to geographical features, his description of Mesopotamia itself in book 6 is vague about the specific topology. The cities and peoples in this passage are sparsely described and are usually located with reference to rivers and each other but not in a clearly two-dimensional way. In fact, the passage is structured as a series comprising a jumbled mixture of lists of undescribed cities which are not located in space, individual cities with brief descriptions (sometimes located in space), and sets of sequentially located spaces and groups which give the impression of a traveller's narrative. The spaces in the series are related to each other only by implication and context. Thus Pliny's description of Mesopotamia in book 6 is structured as a list, within which further lists can be found. Of the lists of peoples Pliny describes here, most are topologically linked only to other population groups. These lists are weakly linked to fixed geographical features, such as rivers or towns. While this gives an impression

¹⁵⁰ Pliny *NH* 6.117–120: "Oppida praeter iam dicta habet Seleuciam, Laodiceam, Artemitam; item in Arabum gente qui Orroei vocantur et Mandani Antiochiam quae a praefecto Mesopotamiae Nicanore condita Arabis vocatur. [118] Iunguntur his Arabes introrsus Eldamari, supra quos ad Pallacontam flumen Bura oppidum, Salmani et Masei Arabes; Gurdiaeis vero iuncti Azoni, per quos Zerbis fluvius in Tigrim eadit, Azonis Silices montani et Orontes, quorum ad occidentem oppidum Gaugamela, item Suae in rupibus. Supra Silicas Sitrae, per quos Lycus ex Armenia fertur, ab Sitris ad hibernum exortum Azochis oppidum, mox in campestribus oppida Dios Pege, Polytelia, Stratonicea, Anthemus. [119] In vicinia Euphratis Nicephorion, quod diximus; Alexander iussit condi propter loci opportunitatem. Dicta est et in Zeugmate Apamea; ex qua orientem petentes excipit oppidum Caphrena munitum, quondam stadiorum LXX amplitudine et Satraparum Regia appellatum quo tributa conferebantur, nunc in arcem redactum. [120] durant, ut fuere, Thebata et, ductu Pompei Magni terminus Romani imperi, Oruros, a Zeugmate CCL."

of a rich description of peoples and places, the fixed features Pliny provides are seldom sufficient to accurately locate the population groups. Moreover, the lists themselves are not linked to each other. Thus Pliny's Mesopotamia is mostly a set of floating lists.

Indicative of this tendency are the short list of settlements that begins the passage (Seleucia, Laodicea and Artemita) and the short list that follows the list of mountain peoples (Dios Pegé (Zeus' Spring), Polytelia, Stratonicea and Anthemus). Several of the places and people that Pliny mentions are difficult to identify, especially when named only by a common dynastic toponym. "Seleucia" could refer to Zeugma (Seleucia on the Euphrates) or Seleucia on the Tigris. Pliny probably means the former, as the latter is described in some detail in the context of Babylonia.¹⁵¹ However, Pliny's does not maintain a strict division between his use of the terms Babylonia and Mesopotamia, and his narrative jumps from place to place on several occasions in his description of the region.¹⁵² The only Artemita known in the region is the city east of the Tigris, described by Isidore as πόλιν Ἑλληνίδα Ἀρτέμιτα.¹⁵³ No towns called Laodicea are known in Mesopotamia.

In the latter group, Pliny does not associate these towns with the preceding population groups directly, rather he does so with an ambiguous "mox" (next). The towns are simply located "in the plains" (*in campestribus oppida*). Which plains? Except for Anthemus, none of these names are known in Mesopotamia or Adiabene, and Anthemusia lies between Edessa and the Euphrates. This known Anthemusia is far to the west of the preceding peoples, but the very next sentence also picks up in western Mesopotamia at Nikephorion. Pliny previously placed Nikephorion in his *praefectura Mesopotamiae*, but without comment.¹⁵⁴ In this second reference to the site, he adds that it was founded by Alexander because of the advantages of the site. In both books, Pliny mentions Anthemus/Anthemusia in close proximity with Nikephorion. Is this the same Anthemus, or a different town of the same name located in Adiabene where the preceding narrative leads? The link to Nikephorion suggests that they are both the same well-known site between Zeugma and the Balikh River. However, in the absence of any direct evidence to anchor any of these sites to any specific part of the region through which Pliny's narrative meanders, these towns cannot be located.

¹⁵¹ Pliny *NH* 6.122.

¹⁵² At *NH* 6.123 Pliny describes several Babylonian *oppida* as "in Mesopotamia".

¹⁵³ Isidore 2; Schoff (1989) 6.

¹⁵⁴ Pliny *NH* 5.86; see Chapter 3.

The final list returns to the banks of the Euphrates to give longer descriptions of some western Mesopotamian locations. This part of Pliny's narrative gives every impression of an itinerary fragment:

Apamea at Zeugma has been mentioned also, from which, heading east, one comes to Caphrena, a fortified town, formerly seventy stadia in size and called the "Palace of the Satraps." Tribute used to be brought here; now it is just a fortress. [120] Thebata is still in the same state as formerly, and Oruros, the limit of Roman power under Pompeius Magnus, 250 miles from Zeugma.¹⁵⁵

Pliny mentioned Apamea in conjunction with his narrative of the Euphrates in book 5.¹⁵⁶ Here, Apamea begins a new itinerary within Pliny's narrative, as indicated by the beginning of the next sentence: "ex qua orientem petentes excipit" ("leaving that city towards the east ..."). The destination is the fortified town (*munitum*) of Caphrena, which Pliny reports to once have been a large centre for tribute collection known as *Satraparum Regia*. The name could be a reference to Persian or Macedonian administration, and such a site would attest to the importance of Mesopotamia within those empires.¹⁵⁷ However, the size of the space (70 stadia!) suggests that Caphrena was associated with a Persian hunting park, a παράδεισος or *paradisus*, rather than an enormous and now vanished city.¹⁵⁸ Several candidates have been proposed for the site of Caphrena, but none are secure.¹⁵⁹

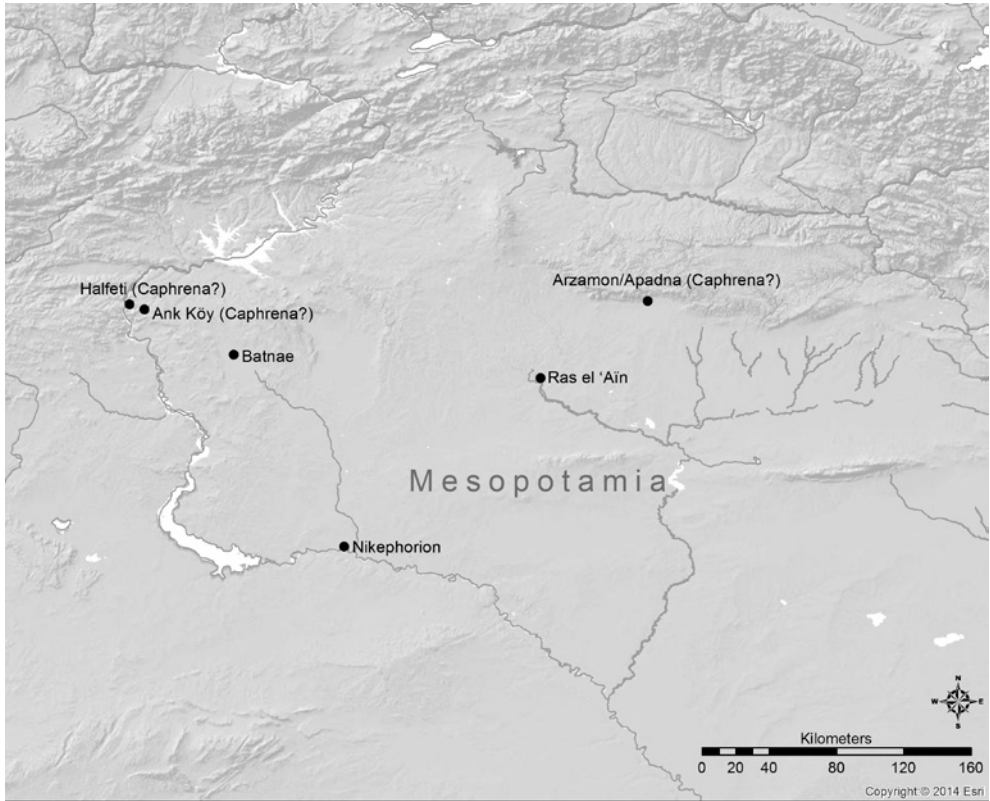
¹⁵⁵ Pliny *NH* 6.119–120: Dicta est et in Zeugmate Apamea; ex qua orientem petentes excipit oppidum Caphrena munitum, quondam stadiorum LXX amplitudine et Satraparum Regia appellatum quo tributa conferebantur, nunc in arcem redactum. [120] durant, ut fuere, Thebata et, ductu Pompei Magni terminus Romani imperi, Oruros, a Zeugmate CCL.

¹⁵⁶ Pliny *NH* 5.86.

¹⁵⁷ Recalling Herodotus' taxation list (3.92) which placed the tax value of "Babylonia and the rest of Assyria" at 1000 talents of silver and 500 castrated boys.

¹⁵⁸ Dillemann (1962) 170; Briant (2002) 201–2, 442–46; Ego, Beate 'Paradise' *BNP*. As Wilkinson et al. (2005) 50 points out such hunting parks probably left a light impression on the physical landscape and, as such, resist location and identification.

¹⁵⁹ The editors of *Pleiades* confidently locate Caphrena at Halfeti on the banks of the Euphrates four kilometres downstream of Rumkale: 'Caphrena' *Pleiades* (<http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/658424>, accessed 21 March 2013). The Barrington Atlas offers an alternative, namely Ank Köy, a site some five kilometres east of the river and seven from Halfeti: *BAtlas* 67 F2 (For Caphrena the directory notes: "Ank Köy?"). Dillemann (1962) 170 proposes that *Satraparum Regia*, the alternate name given for Caphrena by Pliny, is a translation of the Greek *Basileia* and Persian *Apadna*. Apadna is found as a toponym elsewhere in Mesopotamia, at the modern site of Tell Harzem in the Ghars valley, around 10 km



MAP 4.9 Mesopotamian sites in Pliny NH 6

After Caphrena, Pliny mentions Thebata with the curious note that it “remains unchanged” (“durant ut fuere”). Pliny had not previously mentioned a town named Thebata. An earlier reference to Thebata may have been lost from the *Natural History* itself, perhaps from book 5. Pliny may have copied this phrase from his source, without also copying the antecedent, or he may be drawing a contrast between the multiple names and lives of Caphrena/Satraparum Regia and this more durable town. At any rate, Thebata is otherwise unattested, although Dillemann suggests that it may be the same place that Ammianus calls Thilsaphata.¹⁶⁰ Finally, Pliny mentions another site, Oruros, which he calls

(70 stades) from the source of the Ghars River at Ras el 'Ain, Dillemann (1962) 159. Finally, Sinclair's catalogue of east Turkish sites refers to the ruins of a town called Kafhran located north or northwest of Edessa, last mentioned in a traveller's account of 1911: Sinclair (1987) 4.179.

160 Dillemann (1962) 311–12; Boeft et al. (2005) 274. Amm. Marc. 25.8.16.

the boundary of the empire (“terminus Romani imperi”) in Pompey’s time. Pliny places this 250 Roman miles (370 km) from Zeugma. If measured in a straight line, this would put Oruros, and thus Pompey’s border, in the vicinity of an arc linking Dura Europus, Singara and Pinaka where the Tigris emerges from the mountains. In other words, just beyond the Khabur River and the Tur Abdin range. This matches well with the later historical accounts of the first-century CE campaigns of Lucullus and Pompey.¹⁶¹ It also matches well with the general location of the fortress Ammianus calls Ur.¹⁶² Dillemann suggests that Ur/Oruros be located at modern ‘Ain el Chahid (Arabic ‘aīn, Syriac ܐܝܢ, spring) where Sarre and Herzfeld saw the remains of a Roman camp.¹⁶³ This itinerary marks the end of Pliny’s description of northern Mesopotamia. Pliny next jumps to a canal near Babylon and proceeds to describe the southern region.

As in book 5, the structural logic of this part of book 6 is the list. In Chapter 7, I will argue that Pliny’s chaotic organisation of these lists (one of Arab tribes, one of mountain tribes, one of dislocated cities, and one short itinerary fragment) contrasts intentionally with his orderly presentation of Syria in book 5.

2.6 *Adiabene and Parapotamia*

Pliny makes several references to Adiabene throughout his work.¹⁶⁴ In his broad initial description of the various lands that constitute “Syria”, he includes Adiabene, “Assyria ante dicta” (once called Assyria).¹⁶⁵ We have seen that the geographical bounds of “Assyria” are flexible; here Pliny gives only the topological note that it lies beyond Armenia (“ultra Armeniam”).¹⁶⁶ Two passages give further, more detailed, topological information and illustrate the flexibility of the terms “Adiabene” and “Assyria”. The first comes in Pliny’s description of the borders of Armenia where Pliny notes that the Tigris and impassable mountains enclose Adiabene, “Adiabenen Tigris et montes invii cingunt.”¹⁶⁷ This is an accurate description of the geographical region, framed as it is by the Tigris River and the Zagros Mountains. Pliny might also have mentioned the Greater

161 Lucullus’ siege of Nisibis: Dio 36.6–7. Pompey’s intervention in a dynastic squabble in Gordyene: Dio 37.5.2–5. Pompey’s forces marched through Mesopotamia, aided by local communities, even if the route was “contrary to the agreement with the Parthian” (παρὰ τὰ συγχείμενα πρὸς τὸν Πάρθον).

162 Amm. Marc. 25.8.6–7.

163 Dillemann (1962) 311; Sarre and Herzfeld (1911) 2.305–307.

164 Pliny *HN* 5.66; 6.25; 6.28; 6.41–42; 16.44.

165 Pliny *NH* 5.66.

166 Adiabene borders Armenia in the north at Pliny *NH* 6.25.

167 Pliny *NH* 6.28.

and Lesser Zab Rivers, but that would be beyond the general level of precision required for a passage that aims to describe the bounds of Armenia, rather than Adiabene itself. The second passage is more detailed, and more problematic:

The kingdom of the Persians, which we now know as that of the Parthians, was established on the heights of the Caucasus Mountains, between two seas, the Persian and Hyrcanian. As I said, Cephonia is joined to Greater Armenia on both sides by steep slopes running towards the front part which faces Commagene, and to this, Adiabene, where the land of the Assyrians begins, of which the part closest to Syria is Arbelitis, where Alexander defeated Darius. The Macedonians have named this all Mygdonia from its similarity [to Mygdonia in Macedon]. Its towns are Alexandria and Antiochia, which they call Nesebis; it is 750 m.p. from Artaxata. Ninos (Nineveh), placed on the Tigris looking to the west, was once very famous.¹⁶⁸

Pliny places Adiabene adjacent (*proxime*) to Syria, a statement which requires that Mesopotamia be aggregated to one of the two regions. Pliny's list of cities in Adiabene shows part of this: Adiabene contains Alexandria, Antioch ("quam Nesebin vocant"), and Ninos. The description of Nineveh, under the well-known alternate name of Ninos, fits perfectly. Alexandria of Mygdonia is thought to lie near Arbela. It was probably founded in 331 BCE to commemorate the Macedonian's famous victory at nearby Gaugamela, as Pliny's note on Arbelitis recalls ("Arbilitis, ubi Darium Alexander debellavit").¹⁶⁹ While Ninos and Alexandria of Mygdonia both lie within the area on the east bank of the Tigris that we might expect Adiabene to encompass, the last does not. Antioch *quam Nesebin vocant*, that is, Nisibis (Mygdonian Antioch) lies to the west of the Tigris in a region not otherwise attested as Adiabene. In fact, Pliny seems to equate Adiabene and Mygdonia ("totam eam Macedones Mygdoniam cognominaverunt ..."), although he specifies the region he refers to as Mygdonia no

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- 168 Pliny *NH* 6.41–42: "Namque Persarum regna, quae nunc Parthorum intellegimus, inter duo maria Persicum et Hyrcanium Caucasi iugis attolluntur. utrumque per devexa laterum Armeniae Maiori a frontis parte, quae vergit in Commagenen, Cephonia, ut diximus, copulatur eique Adiabene, Assyriorum initium, cuius pars est Arbilitis, ubi Darium Alexander debellavit, proxime Syriae. [42] totam eam Macedones Mygdoniam cognominaverunt a similitudine. oppida Alexandria, item Antiochia quam Nesebin vocant; abest ab Artaxatis DCCL [m.]p. fuit et Ninos, inposita Tigri, ad solis occasum spectans, quondam clarissima."
- 169 Dillemann (1962) 160 n. 3; 'Alexandrian Foundations (1)' *PECS*, p. 39; Cassius Dio mentions the location in his description of Trajan's invasion: Dio 68.26; Theophylactus (5.7.10–11) calls it Alexandriana.

more closely than does Strabo. In his analysis of Seleucid-Parthian Adiabene in geographical and ethnographical texts, Marciak resolves the inclusion of Nisibis within Adiabene by suggesting that Pliny is here writing about the kingdom of Adiabene, a political rather than geographical entity.¹⁷⁰ Marciak notes two important geographical notes provided by Josephus: the gift of Gordyene from the king of Adiabene to his son between 22 and 30 CE and the gift of Nisibis from the Parthian king Artabanos II to that same son, now king of Adiabene.¹⁷¹ Thus in Pliny, the kingdom of Adiabene extends as far as Nisibis, the lands of which are adjacent (*proxime*) to Syria. In this passage, Pliny is likely to be using “Syria” synonymously with *Assyria*, or rather *terrae Assyriorum*, the lands of the Aramaic-speaking Assyrians, as he does in his initial survey of the space at *NH* 5.66, rather than in the political sense of the Roman *provincia*.¹⁷²

The final area to consider before leaving Pliny’s description of the borderland is Parapotamia. In book 6, Pliny refers to a region by this name, but it is not the same area as that described by Strabo:¹⁷³

The region next to the Tigris is called Parapotamia. Mesene, mentioned above, is in this area; it has a town called Dabitha. Adjoining Mesene is Chalonitis, with Ctesiphon, an area forested not only with palms, but also olives and fruit trees. The Zagros Mountains reach this place, coming out of Armenia between Media and Adiabene, above Paratacena and Persis. Chalonitis is 380 miles from Persis; some say it is the same distance from the Caspian Sea and from Syria by the shortest routes. [132] Between these people and Mesene is Sittacene, also called Arbelitis and Palaestina. Sittace is a Greek town of this region, to the east is Sabdata and to the west is Antiochia between the two rivers, Tigris and Tornado, and Apamea, to which Antiochus gave the name of his mother; this [town?] is surrounded by the Tigris and divided by the Archous. [133] Below is Susiana ...¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Marciak (2011) 191–94.

¹⁷¹ Marciak (2011) 192. Gordyene: Josephus *AJ* 20.24. Nisibis: Josephus *AJ* 20.68. On Josephus’ knowledge of internal Parthian affairs, see Rajak (1998).

¹⁷² For the equation of “Syrian” and “Assyria”, see Chapter 3.

¹⁷³ Strabo 16.2.11.

¹⁷⁴ Pliny *NH* 6.131–133: “Proxima Tigri regio Parapotamia appellatur. In ea dictum est de Mesene; oppidum eius Dabitha; iungitur Chalonitis cum Ctesiphonte, non palmetis modo verum et olea pomisque arbusta. Ad eam pervenit Zagrus mons ex Armenia inter Medos Adiabenosque veniens supra Paraetacenen et Persida. Chalonitis abest a Perside CCCLXXX [m.]; tantum a Caspio mari et a Syria abesse conmpendio intineris aliqui tradunt. [132] inter has gentes atque Mesenen Sittacene est, eadem Arbelitis et Palaestine dicta. oppidum eius Sittace Graecorum, ab ortu et Sabdata, ab occasu autem Antiochia

Pliny uses “Parapotamia” to refer to the land near the Tigris, rather than near the Euphrates, as Strabo does. Pliny explicitly includes Mesene within this area, and maybe also Chalonitis, Sittacene and Arbelitis (the latter two of which Pliny conflates). Pliny does not mention the eponymous city of Chala (Halwan), only the important Parthian capital Ctesiphon.¹⁷⁵ Pliny understands Chalonitis to lie south of the Silla River (the modern Diyala) and Sittacene north of the same, adjacent to Arbelitis. Pliny’s Parapotamia thus lies generally south of Adiabene and does not correspond to the area by that name mentioned by Strabo.

2.7 *Pliny’s Narrative*

Pliny’s narrative of the Mesopotamian Borderland uses geographical information as a general framework for the region as a whole, not as an aid to a deeper knowledge of the topological relationships which exist within the space. His description of Syria shows that he prefers to use linear features like rivers and coastlines to establish those topological relationships. In his description of northern Mesopotamia, Pliny creates his own linear features by using lists and itineraries to relate places to one another. Compare this approach to Strabo’s practice of dividing space into successively smaller subdivisions, defined according to different criteria, as fits the subdivisions he defines.

As can be seen in the case of Parapotamia, while Pliny and Strabo agree on most broad geographical points, they do not define the spaces of the Mesopotamian Borderland in the same way. Neither author deliberately distorts the geographical reality of the region, but by defining the borders of the space as a whole and the subsidiary spaces that comprise the borderland according to their own conception of the region, they present a geographical image that shapes their political narrative of Romano-Iranian relations. The political border between the empires was particularly open for this kind of representation; neither author is precise in this regard.¹⁷⁶

3 Ptolemy

Although Ptolemy’s *Geography* does not present a traditional narrative, it does treat space in a deliberately selectively way which allows us to examine it in

inter duo flumina Tigrim et Tornadotum, item Apamea, cui nomen Antiochus matris suae inposuit; Tigri circumfunditur haec, dividitur Archoo. [133] Infra est Susiane ...”

175 He also connects the two at Pliny *NH* 6.122.

176 For a discussion of these representations, see Chapters 5 (Pliny) and 7 (Strabo).

similar ways to the more descriptive accounts of Strabo and Pliny. The two main strands we have been following, imperialising structures and topological presentation, are both visible in Ptolemy's chosen representational style. In particular, Ptolemy's *Geography* presents topological information in a form more familiar to modern geographers: the coordinate plane.

The bulk of the data Ptolemy's work presents comprises coordinate points to locate the many point, line and area features he includes. He makes no attempt to show the paths of linear terrain features or the edges of area features at any but the coarsest level; points are given for rivers at the source, the mouth, and major junctions (ἡ συναφή); the vertices provided for regions present them as basic geometric shapes; mountain ranges are sometimes described as linear features, sometimes simply by their mid-point (τὸ μέσον). Ptolemy is particularly careful to show topological relationships of adjacency between the region he is currently describing and the others in his work. In fact, he criticises his main source, Marinus of Tyre, for a number of relatively trivial omissions of such relationships.¹⁷⁷

Despite his stated aim of producing a macro-level geography of the entire world rather than a chorography of a narrow region comprising "even the most minute features",¹⁷⁸ Ptolemy locates far more features within Mesopotamia than any other extant geographical source. However, his is a mathematical geography and he provides almost no description of the features that fill the spaces he describes. Within Mesopotamia, Ptolemy places two mountain features, τὸ Μάσιον (Mount Masius) and ὁ Σιγγάρας (the Jebel Sinjar) (5.18.2); two rivers following from their sources to the Euphrates, ὁ καλούμενος Χαβώρας (the Khabor) and ὁ καλούμενος Σαοκόρας ποταμὸς (5.18.3); six districts (τὰ χωρία), Anthemusia, Chalkitis, Gauzanitis, Axabene, [T]ingene [Singene?], Ankobaritis (5.18.4); and sixty-nine cities and villages (πόλεις καὶ κῶμαι) (5.18.6–13). These settlements are divided into four groups: those near the Euphrates (5.18.6–7), those near the Tigris (5.18.9), Seleucia (5.18.8) and two neighbouring places (5.18.9), and those in the middle (5.18.10–13).

Each of these geographical features is accompanied by at least one coordinate obtained in one of two ways: by astronomical observation by scientists or by distance measurements obtained from travellers.¹⁷⁹ Ptolemy claims to grant priority to the astronomically derived coordinate data, but he admits that they are fewer and he does not distinguish between the two sources in

¹⁷⁷ Ptol. *Geog.* 1.16.

¹⁷⁸ Ptol. *Geog.* 1.1.

¹⁷⁹ Ptol. *Geog.* 1.2.

the coordinate lists themselves.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, there is no guarantee that the “scientifically observed” data would be any more accurate than that calculated from travel times. In his introduction, Ptolemy spends several paragraphs describing his method for correcting the measurements deriving from travellers’ reports, but those methods ultimately come down to guesswork on Ptolemy’s part.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, Ptolemy takes every pain to make his method clear. In his introduction, he gives frank consideration to the potential for error inherent in his coordinate derivation methodology.¹⁸² Another source of error is that of scribal transcription. Numerals are notoriously prone to transcription errors under the best conditions, but the simple fact that much of Ptolemy’s text comprises rather tedious lists of obscure toponyms related to sets of numeric data compounds the problem of an already unstable manuscript tradition.¹⁸³ Despite these problems, it is instructive to consider the spaces Ptolemy chose to work with and how he divided the world as he saw it between them.

It is difficult for us to relate Ptolemy’s six districts (τὰ χωρία) to the geography of Mesopotamia; it may have been difficult for Ptolemy as well. In his description of Syria Coele, he lists the various cities and villages according to the district in which they were located. In his description of Mesopotamia, he lists

180 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.4.

181 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.8–9. Rihll (1999) 100–101: “His finished work gives a spurious air of accuracy, however, because he decided to present *all* the material to hand – and not just the carefully observed data – in a digital fashion. For example, when told that the journey from X to Y took ‘10 or 12 days’ to cover, Ptolemy translated this into degrees of latitude or longitude via a thumb-rule of average number of *stadia* covered per day, and made other adjustments which in general seem to arise primarily from a desire to simplify the computations.”

182 Ptol. *Geog.* 2.1.2: “...ὅτι τὰς μὲν τῶν τετριμμένων τόπων μοιρογραφίας μήκους τε καὶ πλάτους ἐγγυτάτω τῆς ἀληθείας ἔχειν νομιστέον διὰ τὸ συνεχὲς καὶ ὡς ἐπίπαν ὁμολογούμενον· τῶν παραδόσεων· τὰς δὲ τῶν Ἀρξόμεθα δ’ ἐντεῦθεν τῆς κατὰ μέρος ὑφηγήσεως ἐκείνο προλαβόντες, ὅτι τὰς μὲν τῶν τετριμμένων τόπων μοιρογραφίας μήκους τε καὶ πλάτους ἐγγυτάτω τῆς ἀληθείας ἔχειν νομιστέον διὰ τὸ συνεχὲς καὶ ὡς ἐπίπαν ὁμολογούμενον· τῶν παραδόσεων· τὰς δὲ τῶν μὴ τούτων τὸν τρόπον ἐφοδευθέντων, ἔνεκεν τοῦ σπανίου καὶ ἀδιαβεβαιώτου τῆς ἱστορίας ὁλοσχερέστερον ἐπιτελογίσθαι κατὰ συνεγισμόν τῶν πρὸς τὸ ἀξιοπιστότερον εἰλημμένων θέσεων ἢ σχηματισμῶν, ἵνα μὴδὲν ἡμῖν τῶν ἐνταχθισμένων εἰς συμπλήρωσιν τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης ἀόριστον ἔχη τὸν τόπον.” (... the numbers of degrees in longitude and latitude of well-trodden places are to be considered as quite close to the truth because more or less consistent accounts of them have been passed down without interruption; but [the coordinates] of the [places] that have not been so travelled, because of the sparseness and uncertainty of the research, have been estimated according to their proximity to the more trustworthily determined positions or relative configurations, so that none of the [places] that are to be included to make the *oikumene* complete will lack a defined position.) Trans. Berggren and Jones (2000).

183 Berggren and Jones (2000) 5, 41–50.

the included settlements only in relation to the Tigris and Euphrates, while the districts of Mesopotamia are listed separately (Map 4.10):

[Mesopotamia] has these areas: the places near Armenia, Anthemusia; below which, Chalkitis; and below that: Gauzanitis; and towards the river Tigris, Axabene; and below Gauzanitis, Ingene/Tinigene [Singene?]; and then very close to the Euphrates, Ankobaritis.¹⁸⁴

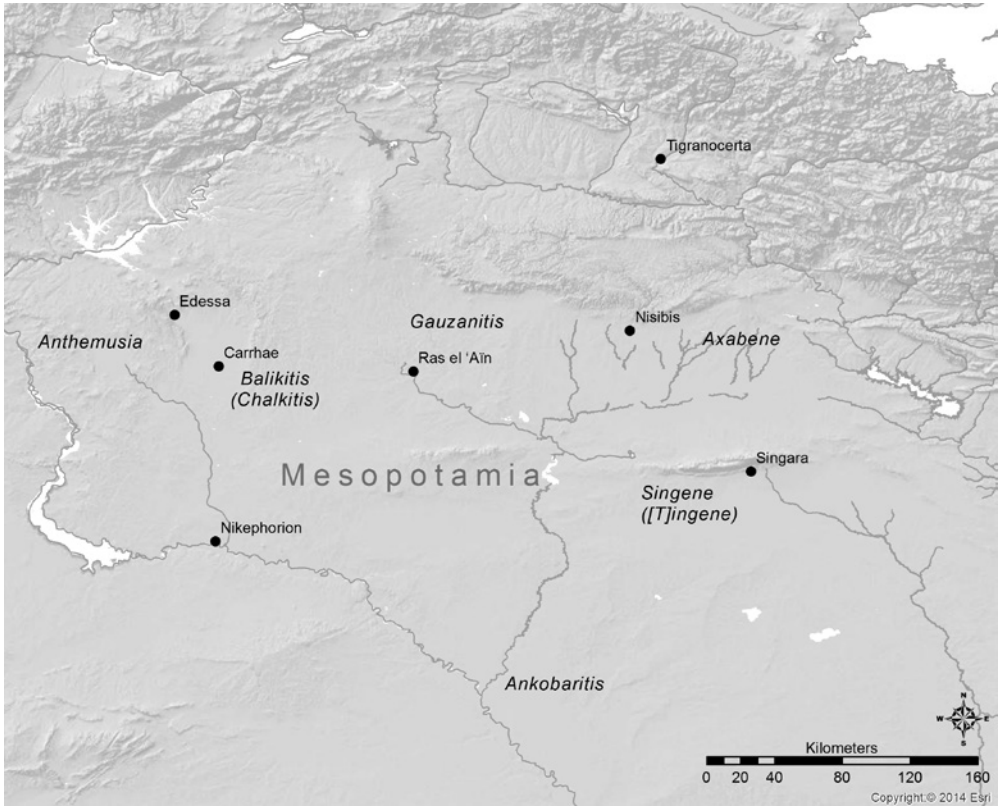
The location of Anthemusia, between the Euphrates and the Balikh around Batnae, is well-known; however, it is not clear why Ptolemy should describe that region as “near Armenia” (πρὸς τῇ Ἀρμενίᾳ). Dillemann identifies Gauzanitis (Γαυζανίτις) with the region of Gauzan associated with the Khabur in *II Kings*, modern Ras el’Ain at the headwaters of the Khabur.¹⁸⁵ By analogy with that region and because Ptolemy places the area he calls Chalkitis (Χαλκίτις) between Anthemusia and Gauzanitis, Dillemann suggests that Χαλκίτις may be a corruption of Βαλικίτις, and represent a region around the headwaters of the Balikh.¹⁸⁶ If this is the case, Ptolemy gives a progression of districts from west to east across the rain-fed northern belt of Mesopotamia: Anthemusia, Balikitis, Gauzanitis, and Akabene near the Tigris (καὶ πρὸς τῷ Τίγριδι ποταμῷ ἢ Ἀκαβηνῇ). He then locates Ingene/Tinigene below Gauzanitis (ὑπὸ δὲ τὴν Γαυζανίτιν ἢ Ἰγγηνή (Τινιγὴν)). Ingene/Tinigene should be emended to Singene, the region around Singara. Finally, south of all of these regions, he places Ankobaritis along the northern bank of the Euphrates (καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ παρὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην ἢ Ἀγκωβαρίτις).

Assuming that Χαλκίτις is a mistake for Balikitis poses no conflict with Ptolemy’s coordinate locations because the name “Balikh” does not appear in Ptolemy’s description of Mesopotamia. He gives the location of two rivers flowing south from the foothills towards the Euphrates, the Khabur and the Saokoras (ὁ καλούμενος Σαοκόρας), but the Khabur is the most westerly of the two. It might be suggested that Ptolemy has reversed the positions of the two rivers and misnamed the Balikh as Saokoras, but the Balikh should flow close

184 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.18.4: “Κατέχει δὲ τῆς χώρας τὰ μὲν πρὸς τῇ Ἀρμενίᾳ ἢ Ἀνθεμουσία, ὅφ’ ἦν ἡ Χαλκίτις, ὑπὸ δὲ ταύτην ἢ τε Γαυζανίτις, καὶ πρὸς τῷ Τίγριδι ποταμῷ ἢ Ἀκαβηνῇ, ὑπὸ δὲ τὴν Γαυζανίτιν ἢ Ἰγγηνή (Τινιγὴν), καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ παρὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην ἢ Ἀγκωβαρίτις.”

185 Dillemann (1962) 102; *II Kings* 17.6: “ἐν ἔτει ἐνάτῳ Ὡσηε συνέλαβεν βασιλεὺς Ἀσσυρίων τὴν Σαμάρειαν καὶ ἀπώκισεν τὸν Ἰσραὴλ εἰς Ἀσσυρίους καὶ κατώκισεν αὐτοὺς ἐν Ἀλαε καὶ ἐν Ἀβωρ ποταμοῖς Γωζαν καὶ ὀρη Μήδων.” (In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria seized Samaria, and deported Israel to Assyria, and settled them in Halah, and in Gozan on the Habor (Khabur) River, and in the land of the Medes.).

186 Dillemann (1962) 102.



MAP 4.10 Ptolemy's Mesopotamia

to Carrhae and emerge near Nikephorion on the Euphrates. Neither river conforms to that topography; Ptolemy places both Carrhae and Nikephorion to the west of the Khabur. Moreover, the Khabur is in more or less the correct place, while Ptolemy has the source of the Saokoras near Nisibis. Arab geographers identified the Saokoras as a tributary of the Khabur.¹⁸⁷ The confused relationship between the towns and rivers of Mesopotamia hints at the degree of error inherent in Ptolemy's coordinates, his tradition, and ultimately the methodologies involved in the collection of his data. Repeated scientific observation of important locations should have been more accurate than estimations of physical movement, but our knowledge of the sources of Ptolemy's data is insufficient to judge for any particular sites.

¹⁸⁷ Musil (1927) 339–40 discusses how the Arabic geographers who used Ptolemy reconciled the identification of the Saokoras and a tributary of the Khabur called el-Hermās.

Ptolemy gives coordinate locations for most of the settlements mentioned in the Mesopotamian descriptions of Strabo and Pliny, although not all of those settlements fall within Mesopotamia as Ptolemy defines it. Strabo discusses Zeugma in his descriptions of both Syria and Mesopotamia, while Ptolemy places it in Syria Coele (5.15.14, specifically in Cyrrhестice). Ptolemy places Tigranocerta in Armenia (5.13.22) and Thapsacus near the Euphrates in Arabia Deserta (5.19.3) rather than Mesopotamia. Ptolemy does not mention the toponyms Sinnaca or Chordiraza,¹⁸⁸ but he places Nikephorion near the Euphrates and Nisibis and Carrhae in the middle region.¹⁸⁹ Pliny referred to Zeugma, Edessa, Carrhae, Anthemusia and Nicephorium in book 5; Ptolemy has Edessa in the middle region, but he mentions Anthemusia only as a district, omitting the town of Batnae/Anthemus. In book 6, Pliny referred to Nisibis as Antioch (a dynastic name also given by Strabo); Ptolemy has Nisibis only. Of the two short lists of towns given by Pliny (Seleucia, Laodicea, Artemita; and Dios Pege, Polytelia, Stratonicea), only Seleucia on the Tigris appears in Ptolemy's list of Mesopotamian communities, although he does locate towns called Artemita in Arabia Deserta and Assyria.¹⁹⁰ Dillemann suggests that Oruro may be listed in Ptolemy as Orthaga (Zagura).¹⁹¹ Neither of Caphrena or Thebata appear in Ptolemy's lists.

A brief consideration of the adjacent regions which form those edges reveals a few details about the internal structure of the region in Ptolemy's account. Three of those regions (Syria, Arabia Deserta and Assyria) are explicitly defined by their relationship to the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.¹⁹² Syria Coele comprises all of northern Syria south of the Amanus and from the Euphrates to the sea.¹⁹³ Ptolemy divides Syria Coele into districts, then locates the cities of Syria within those districts. Whereas in Mesopotamia Ptolemy does not relate his verbal description of the districts to his coordinate lists of the cities and villages, in the Syrian chapter the two are interwoven with the cities listed according to the district in which they are found. This suggests that Ptolemy was better informed about Syria than Mesopotamia. Moreover, he is able to give relative position within those districts; within several of his subdivisions of Syria,

188 Ptolemy includes two settlements called Sinna (Σίννα, 5.18.11 & 12), but both are too far from Carrhae to be linked to the hill called Sinnaca. Dillemann relates Chordiraza to Βαρσάμψη (5.18.5).

189 Νικηφόριον (5.18.6), Νίσιβις (5.18.11) and Κάρραι (5.18.12).

190 Σελεύκεια πόλις (5.18.8); Ἀρτέμιτα (5.19.7 & 6.1.6).

191 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.18.12. Dillemann (1962) 311.

192 Ptol. *Geog.* 15.18.1. Syria and Arabia Deserta by the Euphrates to the west and south respectively and Assyria by the Tigris to the east.

193 Ptol. *Geog.* 5.15.7.

Ptolemy separately lists cities along the Euphrates in Commagene (5.15.10–11), Cyrrhестice (5.15.13–14), Chalybonitis (5.15.17), and Palmyrene (5.15.24–25). These districts, as well as Chalkidice (5.15.18), which he does not extend as far as the Euphrates are the areas relevant to the Mesopotamian Borderland.

There are few discrepancies between Ptolemy's location data and that of Strabo and Pliny, however, neither of those authors mention the presence of Chalybonitis. It can be safely located on the west side of the Euphrates bend from Ptolemy's inclusion of Barbalissos among those cities along the Euphrates. Based on Ptolemy's coordinates, it lay east of Chalkidice and may correspond to part of the region of pastoralists that Strabo called Parapotamia.¹⁹⁴ Pliny also places a group of Skenitai Arabs in this area.¹⁹⁵ Ptolemy's account may indicate a greater degree of urbanisation in this area or show a gap in the knowledge or attention of those earlier authors. It is interesting to note that it is while describing precisely this area that Strabo remarks that the pastoralists on the edges of Syria are more civilised the closer they dwell to the (settled and urbanised) Syrians.¹⁹⁶ Ptolemy's Palmyrene also includes some cities on the Euphrates which would have fallen within this area in which Strabo describes only pastoralists. Moreover, his description of Palmyrene is far more populated than Pliny's account indicated; Ptolemy gives coordinates for 16 cities in all directions around the city which Pliny took pains to isolate.

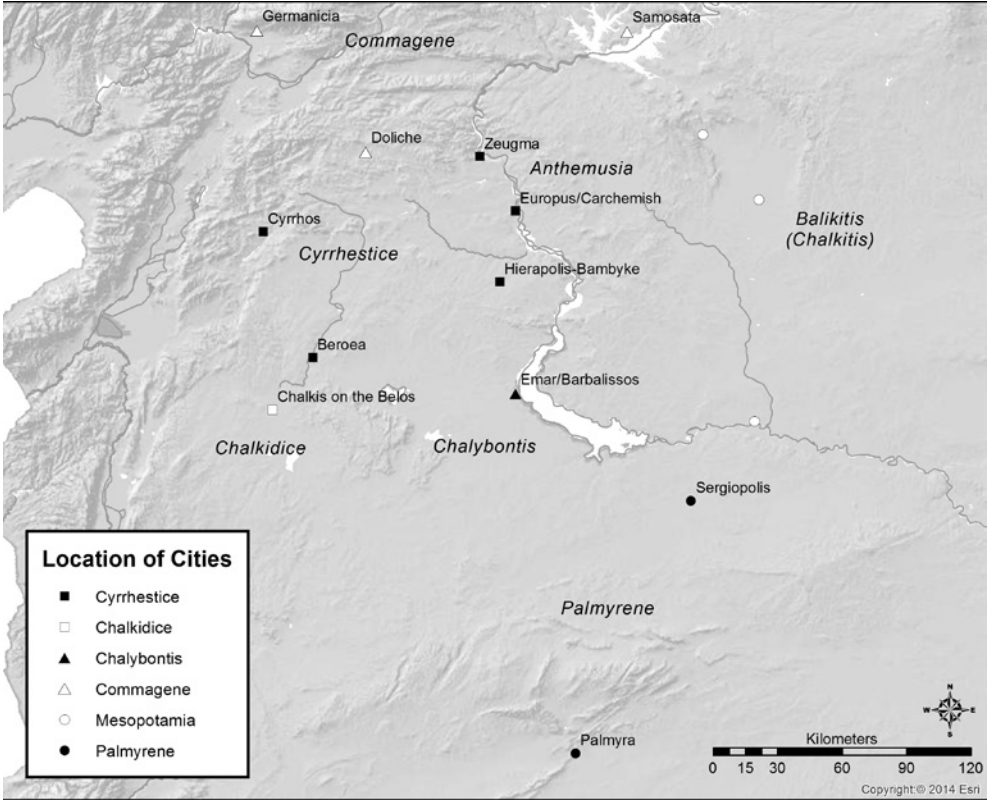
While Syria Coele faces Mesopotamia across the Euphrates predominantly to the east, Arabia Deserta extends south from that river after the district of Palmyrene. It is notable how many cities Ptolemy locates in this region: 3 near the Persians, 26 in the interior and 10 along the Euphrates, including Thapsacus. Across the Tigris, Ptolemy defines Assyria by the adjacent regions of Greater Armenia and the Niphates Mountains to the north, Media to the east, Susiana to the south, and the Tigris to the west.¹⁹⁷ Similarly to his treatment of Mesopotamia, Ptolemy describes the internal subdivisions verbally

194 Strabo 16.2.11.

195 Pliny *NH* 5.87.

196 Strabo 16.2.11.

197 Ptol. *Geog.* 6.1.1: "Ἡ Ἀσσυρία περιορίζεται ἀπὸ μὲν ἄρκτων τῷ εἰρημένῳ τῆς Μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας μέρει παρὰ τὸν Νιφάτην τὸ ὄρος, ἀπὸ δὲ δύσεως Μεσοποταμίας κατὰ τὸ ἐκτεθειμένον τοῦ Τίγριδος ποταμοῦ μέρος, ἀπὸ δὲ μεσημβρίας Σουσιανῆ κατὰ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ Τίγριδος γραμμὴν μέχρι πέρατος..." (Assyria is bordered to the north by the part of Greater Armenia near the Niphates Mountains, to the west by the part of Mesopotamia near the Tigris River, to the south by Susiana right up to the far line of the Tigris ...).



MAP 4.11 Ptolemy's Syrian districts

and without coordinate locations, then organises the region's coordinate locations into two groups according to proximity to the river or position in the interior.¹⁹⁸

4 *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*

The *Expositio Totius Mundi's* division of space between non-Roman and Roman is particularly clear in the Mesopotamian Borderland where the two narrative styles meet. The areas beyond the frontier comprise a linear narration according to ethnic categories, while those within Roman space are organised

¹⁹⁸ Ptol. *Geog.* 6.1.2. Ptolemy's arrangement of Adiabene is discussed by Marciak (2011) 194–95.

according to the administrative structure of the Roman Empire. In both parts, the work is unconcerned with topographical information.

Non-Roman space is structured as a list of regions and population groups.¹⁹⁹ At the start of this part of the *Expositio*, the author indicates that the general direction of description is westerly (“ad occidentem”).²⁰⁰ Thereafter, he gives no directional information, instead connecting each brief description with a simple conjunction (*deinde*) or conjunctive phrase with *post*.²⁰¹ Each description ends with a practical measurement of the extent of that territory in terms of the number of staging posts (*mansiones*) that a traveller would pass in crossing it. The only other topological information is in the use of *adiacio* (to border on) to indicate territorial adjacency.²⁰² This style gives the impression of a connected line of areas rather like neighbourhoods on a bus or train route.²⁰³ The impression of a linear progression is strengthened by the use of *sequor* when the narration reaches Roman territory.²⁰⁴

The territories linked in this way are described in either geographic or cultural terms. Where a reader might not be expected to know the people or land in question, *regio* or *gens* is used with the proper name, but where knowledge of certain lands or peoples is assumed, the proper name stands alone.²⁰⁵ As expected, the latter cases increase in frequency as the narrative draws closer to Roman space. This suggests that the author expects that a significant proportion of his audience will not be familiar with these extra-Roman territories.²⁰⁶ For the author of the *Expositio*, space beyond the Roman Empire is imagined as a linear path through a series of geographic or cultural spaces, an itinerary, as a passing foreign traveller or trader might experience it. The source of this information on extra-Roman territories is an unnamed *historicus*.²⁰⁷

199 Rougé (1966) 56–69.

200 *Expositio* 8.

201 *Post: Expositio* 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 22. *Deinde: Exposito* 15, 16, 17.

202 *Expositio* 13, 17.

203 Also noted by Woodman (1964) 52–53.

204 *Expositio* 22: “Post hos nostra terra est. Sequitur enim Mesopotamia et Osdroena.” (After this is our land. Mesopotamia and Osrhoena follow).

205 *Regio* or *gens* with proper name: *Expositio* 9 (*regio Eviltarum*), 10 (*gens quae vocatur Emer*), 11 (*regio quae appellatus Nebus*), 13 (*regio Disaph*), 14 (*gens sic appellanda Choneum*), 15 (*Diva gens*), 17 (*Exomia regio*), 22 (*Sarracenorum gens*). Proper name alone: *Expositio* 16 (*India maior*), 18 (*India minor*), 19 (*Persae, Romanis propinquant*), 22 (*Mesopotamia et Osdroena*).

206 On the place of these eastern locations in the Roman imagination, see Parker (2008b).

207 *Expositio*, 21: “et haec quidem de praedictis gentibus historicus ait.” (And in fact, an historian says this about the preceding peoples).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the *Expositio* treats Roman space as a collection of area spaces containing unlocated points (cities). This is certainly true of Mesopotamia and Osdroena:

After this is our land; for Mesopotamia and Osrhoene follow. Indeed, Mesopotamia has many diverse cities; I wish to speak of those which are outstanding. Namely, Nisibis and Amida, which have men who are the best men in all things, very acute in business, and good salesmen. The cities are especially wealthy and supplied with all goods: for they receive sellers from Persia into the whole Roman Empire and send back buyers. Except bronze and iron, since it is not permitted to give bronze or iron to foreigners. But those cities ever-standing by means of the forethought of the gods and the emperor, having famous walls, always destroy the courage of the Persians in war. Fervent in business and dealing well with every province. Then Edessa of Osdroenae, also a very splendid city.²⁰⁸

The *Expositio* is only concerned about topological information in a very restricted sense. As can be seen in the description of *Mesopotamia et Osdroena*, the text identifies the Roman province (or group of provinces) which it is about to discuss, then provides little more than a list of cities within it. Sometimes topological relations are implied, such as a reference to a port or naval trade placing a city on a coastline. In Mesopotamia, the *Expositio* refers to only two cities (Nisibis and Amida)²⁰⁹; in *Osdroena* (Osrhoene) only one, Edessa. In choosing to mention only three cities in the entire region of northern Mesopotamia, the *Expositio* displays a high degree of selectivity. This selectivity is evident when we compare that number of cities to Ptolemy, who records 69 Mesopotamian settlements. Pliny and Strabo are both quite selective; Pliny gives around 17 urban communities and Strabo around 10 (depending on which sites such a count includes), but neither are as selective as the *Expositio*. The *Expositio*'s narrative method continues in the text's more detailed description of Syria.

208 *Expositio* 22: "Post hos nostra terra est. Sequitur enim Mesopotamia et Osdroena. Mesopotamia quidem habet civitates multas et varias, quarum excellentes sunt quas volo dicere. Sunt ergo Nisibis et <Amida>, quae in omnibus viros habent optimos et in negotio valde acutos et bene venantes. Praecipue et divites et omnibus bonis ornati sunt: accipientes enim a Persis ipsi in omnem terram Romanorum vendentes et ementes iterum tradunt, extra aeramen et ferrum, quia non licet hostibus dare aeramen aut ferrum. Ista autem civitates semper stantes deorum et imperatoris sapientia, habentes moenia inclita, bello semper virtutem Persarum dissolvunt; ferventes negotiis et tranigentes cum omni provincia bene. Deinde Osdroenae Edessa et ipsa civitas splendida."

209 The manuscript's first reference to Edessa should be emended to Amida. See Chapter 3.

After Mesopotamia and Osrhene, the *Expositio* moves on describe the three Syrian provinces, Syria Punica, Syria Palestina and Syria Coela, together and at some length.²¹⁰ Besides making this initial distinction, the *Expositio* treats all three provinces as one area and shows no concern for accurate topological description. The narrative jumps around Syria from city to city, connected by conjunctive adverbs like *iam*²¹¹ and *post*²¹² without adhering to a topological order. Instead, the narrative highlights large, important, coastal cities and includes inland and smaller coastal cities in lists.²¹³ These cities are described almost exclusively in economic terms, except for the section on Antioch's regional primacy and the importance of the legal school at Berytus.²¹⁴

Beyond Roman space, the narrative's linear progression towards the Empire from the east is a sort of ethnic itinerary which only places those peoples in a linear relation to each other. Within Roman space, the text organises the world into analytical containers, named but given little definition, reserving its description for the cities about which the text is primarily concerned.

5 Ammianus

The loss of Ammianus' geographical description of Mesopotamia and Osdroena limits our ability to discuss his approach to the region. The omission of these provinces from his survey is particularly painful given Ammianus' first-hand experience of the region and the quality of his other geographical descriptions.²¹⁵ Ammianus displayed his erudition through references to and citations of important works and figures in the historiographical and geographical traditions that preceded him, but he also relied on geographical autopsy

²¹⁰ *Expositio*, 23–33.

²¹¹ *Expositio*, 24, 26, 27.

²¹² *Expositio*, 25 (accepting the textual reconstruction from the *Descriptio*, “<Post istam> Berytus ...”).

²¹³ Highlighted cities: Antioch (*Expositio* 23) and her two ports Laodicea (27) and Seleucia (28), Tyre (24), Berytus (25), Caesarea (26), and Ascalon and Gaza (together at 29). Listed cities: Neapolis, Tripolis, Scythopolis, Byblus, Heliopolis, Sidon, Sarepta, Ptolemais, Eleutheropolis, Damascus (*Expositio* 30). While Heliopolis receives a note about the beauty of its women, it is otherwise undescribed and appears between two lists of cities.

²¹⁴ Economic descriptions of Tyre (*Expositio* 24), Caesarea (26), Ascalon and Gaza (29); the political importance of Antioch (23); the legal school at Berytus (25). After the *Expositio*'s winding survey of Syria, the text includes a specific section on produce and trade goods in Syria: *Expositio* 31.

²¹⁵ In particular, his detailed descriptions of Gaul (15.10–11), Lower Pannonia (21.10.3–4), Egypt (22.15–16) and Thrace (27.4).

to a degree uncharacteristic of those traditions.²¹⁶ For the geography of the eastern provinces, Ammianus' autopsy derived from his upbringing in Antioch and his military service in Mesopotamia. The lost description of Mesopotamia and Osdroena occurred in a context describing the Parthian wars. Ammianus' history focused on the Roman emperors from Nerva (96–98 CE) to Valens (378 CE) and their activities at court, in civil conflicts and in their foreign expeditions.²¹⁷ The historical context of the lost description was probably an account of Trajan's Mesopotamian campaign, but if not then, he would have found ample occasion for a detailed examination of the space in relation to the campaigns of Lucius Verus or the Severans during which the Roman provincial structures of Mesopotamia and Osroene were established.²¹⁸

The first specific area within Assyria that Ammianus describes is Adiabene, which he notes was once called Assyria ("Assyria priscis temporibus vocitata").²¹⁹ Ammianus relates the Greek etymological theory that Adiabene was named from διαβαίνειν, to cross, because it was positioned between two rivers.²²⁰ He refers to unnamed ancient authorities ("veteres quidem hoc arbitrantur") that the two rivers were the Ona and Tigris, but suggests, based emphatically on his personal experience of the area, that the two rivers were in fact the Diabas and Adiabab.²²¹ These were probably the Greater and Lesser Zab.²²² While this

216 Sundwall (1996) 624–25.

217 Amm. Marc. 31.16.9.

218 For these campaigns, see Chapter 1.

219 Amm. Marc. 23.6.20. See Boeft et al. (1998) 36 on 23.3.1.

220 In fact, it is from the Aramaic name for the region *Ḥadyab*.

221 Amm. Marc. 23.6.20–21: "Intra hunc circuitum Adiabena est, Assyria priscis temporibus vocitata longaue adusuetudine ad hoc translata vocabulum ea re quod inter Onam et Tigridem sita navigeros fluvios adiri vado numquam potuit: transire enim diabaenae dicimus Graeci. [21] et veteres quidem hoc arbitrantur. nos autem id dicimus quod in his terris amnes sunt duo perpetui, quos ipsi transivimus, Diabas et Adiabab iunctis navalibus pontibus, ideoque intellegi Adiabenam cognominatam ut a fluminibus maximis Aegyptos Homero auctore et India et Euphratensis ante hoc Commagena, itidemque Hiberia ex Hiberno, nunc Hispania, et a Baeti amne insigni provincia Baetica." (Within this area is Adiabena, called Assyria in ancient times, but by long custom changed to this name because, lying between the navigable rivers Ona and Tigris it could never be approached by a ford; for we Greeks for *transire* say διαβαίνειν. At least, this is the opinion of the ancients. [21] But I myself say that there are two perpetually flowing rivers to be found in these lands, the Diabas and Adiabab, which I myself have crossed, and over which there are bridges of boats; and therefore it is to be assumed that Adiabena was named from them, as from great rivers Egypt was named, according to Homer, as well as India, and the Euphratensis, before my time called Commagena; likewise from the Hiberus, Hiberia (now Hispania), and the province of Baetica from the noble river Baetis.) Boeft et al. (1998) 152–53.

222 Marciak (2011) 196–99.

etymological discussion provides the incidental geographical information that these two rivers formed the boundaries of Adiabene, Ammianus gives no further description of the physical geography of the region. As is often the case in his geographical descriptions, and in accordance with Roman administrative logic, Ammianus is more concerned with the cities to be found in a region than with physical geography and topology.²²³ His placement of Ninus (Nineveh), Arbela and Gaugamela in Adiabene is entirely consistent with other Roman geographic writers.²²⁴ He also locates Ecbatana in Adiabene in this section, perhaps reflecting a close administrative relationship between that Persian capital and this region. Elsewhere, he correctly places this city in Media.²²⁵

The rest of Ammianus' description of Assyria refers to places in southern Mesopotamia. He begins with a simple list of cities: "Apamea, formerly called Mesene, and Teredon, Apollonia and Vologessia".²²⁶ Vologesia (or Vologesocerta/Balashkert) was a Parthian city founded in the first century CE by Vologases I (r. ca. 51–78 CE) as part of the urban conglomeration of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (now known as Al-Mada'in).²²⁷ The other three cities may be those listed by Ptolemy: Apamea near the Tigris in Mesopotamia, "μετὰ τὴν Σελεύκειαν" (near Seleucia); Teredon in Babylonia, also near the Tigris; and Apollonia in the inland areas of Assyria.²²⁸ He goes on to list the three most illustrious cities in southern Mesopotamia: Babylon, Ctesiphon and Seleucia.²²⁹

223 Amm. Marc. 23.6.22: "In hac Adiabena Ninus est civitas, quae olim Persidis regna possederat, nomen Nini potentissimi quondam regis Samiramidis mariti declarans, et Ecbatana et Arbela et Gaugamela, ubi Dareum Alexander post discrimina varia proeliorum incitato Marte prostravit." (In this Adiabena is the city of Ninus, which once held sovereignty over Persia, proclaiming the name of Ninus, a once most powerful king and the husband of Semiramis; also Ecbatana, Arbela, and Gaugamela, where Alexander, after various other battles, overthrew Darius by the incitement of Mars.) Boeft et al. (1998) 153–55.

224 Ammianus elsewhere (18.7.1) describes Nineveh as the great city of Adiabene ("Nineve Adiabena ingenti civitate"). Jonge (1980) 222–23.

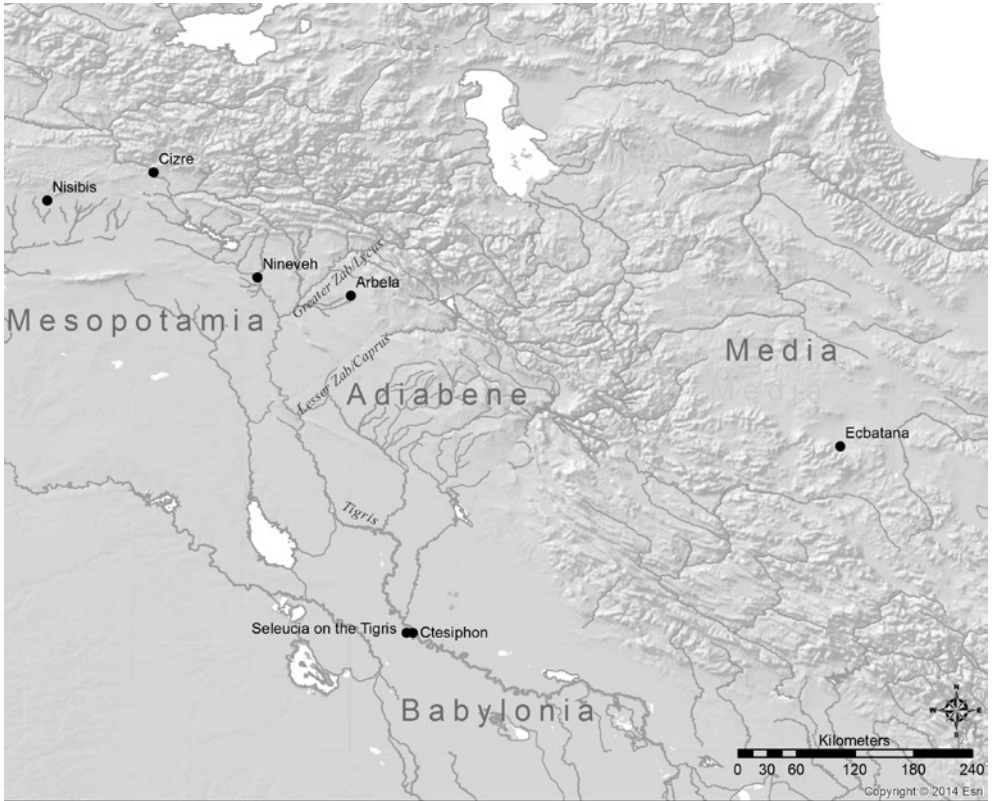
225 Amm. Marc. 23.6.39; Hdt. 1.98; Ecbatana is modern Hamadan. Calmeyer, Peter, 'Ecbatana' *BNP*; Bosworth and Frye (2007); Boeft et al. (1998) 177–78.

226 Amm. Marc. 23.6.23: "In omni autem Assyria multae sunt urbes. inter quas Apamia eminet Mesene cognominata et Teredon et Apollonia et Vologessia hisque similes multae." (However, in all Assyria there are many cities, among which Apamea, named Mesene, Teredon, Apollonia and Vologessia and many others stand out.) Boeft et al. (1998) 155–56.

227 Kröger, Jens, 'Ctesiphon', *Elran*. Seleucia on the Tigris: Chaumont (1984) 101–4.

228 Apamea: Ptol. *Geog.* 5.18.9. Teredon: Ptol. *Geog.* 5.20.5. Apollonia: Ptol. *Geog.* 6.1.6.

229 Amm. Marc. 23.6.23: "splendidissimae vero et pervulgatae hae solae sunt tres: Babylon cuius moenia bitumine Samiramis struxit – arcem enim antiquissimus rex condidit Belus – et Ctesiphon quam Vardanes temporibus priscis instituit, posteaque rex Pacorus incolarum viribus amplificatam et moenibus Graeco indito nomine, Persidis effecit specimen summum. post hanc Seleucia ambitiosum opus Nicatoris Seleuci." (But these three alone are the most illustrious and populous: Babylon, whose walls Semiramis built with



MAP 4.12 Adiabene in context

In Chapter 3, I argued that Ammianus' regional conception of space was based on administrative divisions. At a closer level, Ammianus fills those administrative spaces with cities.²³⁰ In regions with which he is more familiar, Ammianus' narrative has more texture.

bitumen (for the ancient king Belus built the citadel), and Ctesiphon, which Vardanes founded long ago; and later king Pacorus strengthened it with additional inhabitants and with walls, gave it a Greek name, and made it the crowning glory of Persia. And after this is Seleucia, the ostentatious work of Seleucus Nicator.) Boeft et al. (1998) 156–58.

²³⁰ Ammianus' treatment of Adiabene as a space containing cities is similar to his treatment of the Roman portions of Julian's march (23.2.6–23.3, 23.5.1–2). In Chapter 3, I noted that Ammianus mentions several cities along the route: Hierapolis in Euphratensis, Batnae in Osrohoene where the road splits, Carrhae, Davae, the Balikh River, Callinicum, Cercesium, and the Khabur River where Ammianus marks a geographic, administrative and narrative border. These cities are connected with the language of travel, largely without geographical elaboration.

In a particularly memorable section of his *Res Gestae*, Ammianus' narrative focuses on events in the Roman province of Mesopotamia itself. His personal involvement in the defence of Mesopotamia against Shapur's invasion and siege of Amida in 359/60 provides insight into his narrative approach. When Ursicinus' staff (including Ammianus) are sent to Mesopotamia, they appear first in Nisibis.²³¹ From there, Ammianus gives the state of affairs:

While urgent preparations were underway inside the walls, smoke and flickering fires shone out constantly from the Tigris through Castra Maurorum, Sisara and the rest of the frontier as far as the city, unbroken and more closely together than usual, showing clearly that enemy raiding parties had burst out and crossed the river.²³²

Ammianus' description suggests an observer standing on the walls of Nisibis watching a line of devastation traced across the countryside. Despite the toponyms, this description is not based on geographical knowledge, but based on imagined vision. This is characteristic of Ammianus' approach. Shortly after, he describes the area around Amudia as a level plain without hiding places in an account of an episode in which he is looking for hiding places.²³³ At 18.6.19, two rivers are mentioned, not because of their geographical significance, but because that crossing meant that the Persians had invaded. In a famous passage, Ammianus sneaks through pathless mountains and steep defiles (*per avios montes angustiasque praecipites veni*) to reach a precarious cliff (*mittor ad praeceps rupes*).²³⁴ There, he can observe the entire circuit of the lands (*cernebamus terrarum omnes ambitus aubiectos*) and the innumerable Persian army arrayed upon it, compared in poetic style to that of Xerxes.²³⁵ The detail of Ammianus' account, including descriptions of individual commanders and sacrificial rituals, are a clear indication that the episode occupies an ambiguous zone between eyewitness account and literary fantasy. Attempts to locate the site based on this description must contend with the possibility that it is

²³¹ Amm. Marc. 18.6.8.

²³² Amm. Marc. 18.6.9: "Dumque intra muros maturanda perurgerentur, fumus micantesque ignes adsidue a Tigride per Castra Maurorum et Sisara et conlimitia reliqua ad usque civitatem continui perlucabant solito crebriores, erupisse hostium vastatorias manus superato flumine permonstrantes." Jonge (1980) 173–75.

²³³ Amm. Marc. 18.6.13.

²³⁴ Amm. Marc. 18.6.21.

²³⁵ Amm. Marc. 18.6.22.

largely exaggerated.²³⁶ Examples could be multiplied.²³⁷ Kelly has argued persuasively that Ammianus deploys the first person to authorise his narrative, sometimes adding geographic detail, but always in service of his narrative.²³⁸

Nevertheless, it is possible to assemble a picture of Mesopotamian geography from the text of the *Res Gestae*.²³⁹ Ammianus gives the names of many cities and fortifications, and the logic of his narrative allows many to be identified and located. His purpose is to craft an engaging historical narrative eyewitness account of events he witnessed in a place with which he was familiar. He draws on that familiarity to illustrate his narrative with verisimilitudinous elements which enliven and authorise his version of events.²⁴⁰ To a certain extent, geographical accuracy is an accidental byproduct of Ammianus' purpose.

As a geographical writer, Ammianus is mostly concerned to contextualise the historical events he describes. Where he embarks on significant geographical digressions, it is to describe a place or people relevant to an impending conflict. That his geography is in service of an engaging historical narrative makes it no less valuable. Ammianus was a keen observer of events, situations and space and provides valuable geographic information about the Mesopotamian Borderland. His focus lies on the places in which history occurred, especially cities and sites important to his narrative goals. As well as the episodes discussed here, we should consider in this latter category places such as the crossing-point of the Khabur, ripe with liminal symbolism, and the sites where Julian witnessed omens of his death. Moreover, Ammianus' geographical descriptions show the relatively strict division of space between the two empires which had developed over the subsequent four centuries, a topic to which I will return in Chapter 7.

6 Narrating Topologically

It has become commonplace to describe the Roman conception of space and movement as linear and hodological. An understanding of the availability of

236 Matthews (1989) 48–51 who notes the presence of Ammianus' literary imagination, but presses on regardless. Kelly (2008) 81–87 discusses the literary mastery of the passage.

237 Consider the role of the Tigris and Taurus in the cavalry battle at 18.8.9, the geographical notes about Amida during the siege (18.10–19.8).

238 Kelly (2008).

239 As does Matthews (1989) 51–57. In fact, "pictures" may be the best way to conceptualise Ammianus' geographical descriptions; Sundwall on 14.2.2 says: "This combination of spatial representation with literary technique displays Ammianus' use of geography at its best," Sundwall (1996) 639.

240 For example, at Batnae and the banks of the Khabur (Abora): Sundwall (1996) 629.

linear conceptions of space in the ancient world is a valuable tool for understanding certain texts and manners of thought; however, the distinctiveness of that conception of space can be exaggerated. Some consideration of this aspect of Roman imperial geographic narratives is warranted. This is an issue of narrative and descriptive topology: how places are located relative to each other and how they are described as such in the narrative. Although many texts and narrative segments display a linear understanding of space, the imperial geographic writers frequently structured and delimited space using planar, “map-like”, conceptions of the world. Such a view dominates the scientific geography of Claudius Ptolemy (as we might expect for a text explicitly described as instructions for making a map), but it is evident in the less technical geographical works as well and serves as a reminder that there were many ways of understanding geographic space in the ancient world.

Each of these five authors establishes the topological relationships between the places they discuss in distinct ways, each appropriate to their geographical project. Strabo’s approach is consistent throughout his work. He defines the regional area to be described by relation to geographical features, often divides the broad area into smaller spaces also by geographical features, then works his way systematically through the smaller areas until the entire region has been described. In the Mesopotamian Borderland, he describes Assyria as a whole, then the sub-regions which comprise it, including Mesopotamia. He divides Mesopotamia into three parts using relative topology, physical geography and ethnography as references: One part is along the mountains (ἡ παρὸρείος), another is inhabited by the Gordyceans (τὰ τῶν Γορδυαίων χωρία), and the last is towards the south and further from the mountains (τὰ δὲ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν κεκλιμένα καὶ ἀπωτέρω τῶν ὄρων).²⁴¹ This descriptive approach is rooted in the two-dimensional topology of the space.²⁴² Parts of the area are near the Euphrates (πρὸς τῷ Εὐφράτῃ), Nisibis is at the foot of mount Masius (ὑπὸ τῷ Μασίῳ ὄρει), and the river Aborras flows near Anthemousia (περὶ τὴν Ἀνθεμουσίαν).²⁴³ By relating features and places to each other in this way, Strabo allows the reader to imagine themselves moving and viewing within the

241 Strabo 16.1.23, 24, 26.

242 Strabo often structures his descriptions along lines of communications, such as those afforded by rivers, roads or coastlines, Dueck (2000) 167–68. His description of Mesopotamia does not use either river in this way; rather, it has a clear sense of two-dimensionality. His work generally mentions topological relationships between the spaces he describes, often in the initial survey. For example, see his initial survey of οἱ Ἀσσύριοι (16.1) which is bordered by (συνάπτουσιν) Persis and Susiana and stretches as far as the Cilicians, Phoenicians and Judaeans (μέχρι Κιλικίων καὶ Φοινίκων καὶ Ἰουδαίων).

243 Strabo 16.1.23, 27; Biffi (2002) 169.

space. By emphasising the relationships between geographical features, this topological approach constructs a physical and political geography based on spatial connections and movement. Strabo's Mesopotamia is a geographical space interrelated at the local, regional, and supra-regional levels.²⁴⁴

Pliny provides topological information in a quite different way to Strabo. Although Strabo organises parts of his work as itineraries or *periploi*, there are moments of two-dimensional, planar description throughout. By contrast, Pliny's geographical work is fundamentally linear. This is most obvious in his description of Syria, which consists of a linear narrative up the coast and down the interior, broken only by the two strictly atopolological lists of north Syrian cities and peoples. The part of Pliny's Mesopotamian narrative included with his description of Syria in book 5 is based around a list of sub-regions (Osrhoene/Oroeni Arabia, *praefectura Mesopotamiae* and the land of the Praetavi Arabs) with atopolologically listed contents (Edessa and Carrhae, Nikephorion and Anthemusia, and Singara). The first item of this list (Osrhoene) is located in space by a topological relationship (it faces Commagene across the Euphrates), while the rest simply appear as a list which follow Osrhoene. In book 6, Mesopotamia is also structured as a series of lists. Whereas the two north Syrian lists are interspersed with descriptive asides which act to hide their alphabetical nature, the series of lists which comprise Pliny's description of Mesopotamia is interspersed with spatial dislocations. The population groups that comprise these lists are linked to each other and occasionally to independent topographical features, but not with sufficient detail that they could be located in space if not for those topological connections to the other tribes on the list.

Ptolemy's *Geography* is highly topological, but the mathematical basis of his work means that his account is of a different nature to the other Imperial geographic writers. At the broadest level, each region is topologically located by relationships of adjacency based on a combination of cardinal directions and geographical features: Mesopotamia is described as adjacent to Syria, Armenia, Assyria, Babylonia and Arabia Deserta.²⁴⁵ Similar relationships are often established between districts within each region.²⁴⁶ Within Mesopotamia, internal districts are topologically linked to each other and to the surrounding geography (Anthemusia is near Armenia, Akabene is near the Tigris and Ankobaritis is near the Euphrates). Only some of the cities of Mesopotamia are related to a geographical feature (namely those noted as near the Euphrates and Tigris

²⁴⁴ At the supra-regional level, see Strabo's construction of Assyria, Strabo 16.1.1.

²⁴⁵ Ptol. *Geog.* 5.18.1.

²⁴⁶ Ptol. *Geog.* 5.18.4.

Rivers), but all are topologically located to each other through coordinate geometry. However, in Syria, the districts are related to the features within them rather than to each other. The individual coordinate locations which make up the bulk of Ptolemy's work also act to topologically relate the sites to each other, but at an order removed. That is, he provides the tools for the reader to locate those features, but the relationships are not apparent until the reader recreates Ptolemy's map itself.

Much like Strabo, Ammianus uses topological relationships to establish a clear sense of two-dimensionality in his geographical narratives.²⁴⁷ He begins his geographical descriptions by orienting the reader, such as in his description of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire which begins with an imaginary crossing of the Taurus ("superatis Tauri montis verticibus ... Cicilia spatiis porrigitur late distentis ...").²⁴⁸ He then uses relative topological references to move through the space described by his narrative (in the same case, "... eiusque lateri dextro annexa Isauria ...").²⁴⁹ The spatial organisation of each geographical passage varies according to its purpose in the overall narrative. In his descriptions of the Roman provinces and Persian *regiones*, topological references convey a good sense of the two-dimensional space, while in his account of Julian's march, he appropriately links geographical space in a linear fashion along the route.

The author of the *Expositio* understands two-dimensional spatial structure, but is generally unconcerned with it. This understanding can be shown by a concern to demonstrate the westerly direction ("ad occidentem") of the initial description of the peoples beyond Roman space,²⁵⁰ and later, between the descriptions of Syria and Egypt, the text indicates that Egypt lay to the left of Syria ("de laeva parte Syriae").²⁵¹ This reveals the familiar conception of geographical orientation which places north at the top of a map, with west as left and east as right. This conception is also seen after the *Expositio*'s lengthy and less-disjointed description of Egypt.²⁵² When the narrative moves east,

247 See the excellent analysis of Sundwall (1996) esp. 633ff.

248 Amm. Marc. 14.8.1: "When the summits of the Taurus have been crossed ... Cilicia extends widely in an open plain ..." Jonge (1972) 53–55. For further discussion on this passage, see Sundwall (1996) 633–34.

249 Amm. Marc. 14.8.1: "... and Isauria, connected on the right side of [Cilicia] ..." Jonge (1972) 57–58.

250 *Expositio* 8.

251 *Expositio*, 34: "Habes ergo de laeva parte Syriae et Aegypti et Alexandriae et totius Thebaidis partes, quas describere necessarium est." (Therefore on the left of Syria you have Egypt, Alexandria and the whole Thebaid; these must be described.).

252 *Expositio*, 34–37. Alexandria is a special focus of this passage.

Arabia is described as “de dextris ... Syriae”.²⁵³ However, as in the description of Mesopotamia, the author provides no internal topological structure to the provinces described. The text neither describes the physical geography of Mesopotamia, nor topologically relates the places and spaces it mentions to each other or the wider space. The *Expositio*'s description includes the people who inhabit those two provinces, but in an economic rather than an ethnographic or cultural way.

These five accounts of Mesopotamian space show the variety of geographical methods that were available to the Roman Imperial geographic writers. This variety included not only the specifics of exactly where the boundaries of the chosen space were placed, but whether they were defined in geographical, political or ethno-cultural terms. Judging by the frequency with which they appear and the detail with which they were described, cities were the most important type of place in ancient Roman geography. The case of Nisibis illustrates the variety of topological approaches to locating cities among these authors. In Strabo, Nisibis is located within an internal district of Mesopotamia (Mygdonia) and topologically linked to a nearby geographical feature (Masius), in the *Expositio*, it floats adrift in the *provincia Mesopotamia*, while in Ptolemy, it is somewhat adrift in the middle region between the rivers but nevertheless connected to the rest of Mesopotamia by its common attachment to Ptolemy's coordinate plane.²⁵⁴ As in Strabo, the same city can be treated in quite different ways in the same work. In book 6 of Pliny's *Natural History*, Nisibis appears twice, once in a topological relationship to a tribe in a linear list of tribes and once as the unattached capital of Mygdonia (itself curiously aggregated to Adiabene).²⁵⁵ In the extant books of Ammianus, it appears a number of times in a variety of contexts and topologies, where it is related to the narrative as appropriate, but without much geographical information.²⁵⁶ The case of Nisibis is indicative of the varied treatment that the Mesopotamian Borderland, and the places and spaces contained within it, receive in the geographical sources.²⁵⁷ Moreover, it is indicative of the way that the geographical writers might *not*

253 *Expositio*, 38.

254 Strabo 16.1.23; *Expositio* 22; Ptol. *Geog.* 5.18.11.

255 Pliny NH. 6.117 (in a list of Arab tribes); 6.42 (as the capital of Mygdonia). Nisibis does not appear in book 5, despite the coverage of that book extending as far east as Singara, southeast of Nisibis.

256 Nisibis appears 16 times in 11 passages: Amm. Marc. 14.9; 18.6; 18.7; 19.9; 20.6; 20.7; 23.6; 25.1; 25.7; 25.8; 25.9.

257 The economic and political roles of Nisibis in the borderland are examined in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively.

select certain sites, parts of the region, or aspects of the borderland as worthy of representation in their construction of the space.

7 Narrating Imperially

Chapter 2 discussed how the geographic writers of the early Empire were dependent on Hellenistic material in their geographic narratives. In this chapter, we saw the sheer quantity of Hellenistic information that the works of Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy contained, most obtained from literary sources. None of those authors make grandiose claims of widespread autopsy. Strabo comes closest when he claims to have travelled further than any other single geographer,²⁵⁸ but he immediately follows this claim with an argument for the validity of relying on second hand geographical description. Strabo places literary sources on the same level as sense perception for the accumulation of geographical knowledge. Pliny goes further and prioritises secondary research to personal observation. Ptolemy likewise makes no claim to autopsy and places himself in the position of being a corrector of a longer tradition, and Marinus in particular.

This chapter also showed how these Roman authors worked with that Hellenistic material. The Hellenistic origin of much of their source material marked the structure of their texts and provided certain methodological models for the description of space. All three authors thus worked within a framework which prioritised the transmission of knowledge between and through existing texts, rather than the collection and creation of new knowledge. This accumulation of Hellenistic material required careful selection and arrangement in order to craft the desired narrative. A comparison of Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy makes this clear. Ptolemy displays a lower degree of selectivity, instead aiming at a more exhaustive treatment, built upon the body of evidence that his predecessor had collected and focused on the correction of factual and technical errors. The space that he constructs is Hellenistic in that it is recorded and transmitted within the sedimentary structures of Hellenistic science. The material handed down by Ptolemy attests to the collection of coordinate data by his predecessors in the Hellenistic tradition of mathematical geography. Strabo and Pliny also reflect and construct Hellenistic space through these structures and through their geographic material. The inclusion of Macedonian spaces and events locates Macedonian history in the geographical space of

²⁵⁸ Strabo 2.5.11.

Mesopotamia and locates that space within the stage of Macedonian history. The geography of Mesopotamia is thus an imperialist colonial history.²⁵⁹

A brief survey of the accounts of Strabo and Pliny will show the extent to which their material constructs Mesopotamia as a Macedonian colonial space. Strabo's description of Mesopotamia is filled with references to Hellenistic conquests, scholarship and colonisation. The first two sections (16.1.21–22) refer to Alexander's crossing of the Tigris before the battle of Gaugamela, mention Eratosthenes three times, and use the important Macedonian foundations of Zeugma and Seleucia on the Tigris as reference points for long-distance measurements. His description of the fertile area near the mountains (16.1.23) names eight locations, of which two were Macedonian foundations with Greek names (Zeugma and Nikephorion), two were Macedonian colonies founded in major cities which retained their local names (Nisibis and Carrhae), one was a Hellenistic foundation of the Hellenised Pontic kingdom (Tigranocerta), one has an Iranian name (Chordiraza), and two had Aramaic names (Sinnaca and Thapsacus).²⁶⁰ This apparent diversity is reduced if the eight sites are expressed differently: four were apparent as Macedonian colonies either through their relative fame or the Hellenic nature of their name (Nisibis, Carrhae, Zeugma and Nikephorion), two more were important sites in the Roman history of the region (Tigranocerta and Sinnaca, as well, of course, as Carrhae), and one would have been well-known by a reader familiar with the campaigns of Xenophon and Alexander (Thapsacus). Sites with Greek allusions predominate. To these should be added the sites which Strabo located in this northern area in his description of the commercial route down the Euphrates: Bambyce/Hierapolis/Edessa and Anthemusia.²⁶¹ The three sites reflected in these names bear respectively a Greek name and the names of two Macedonian cities.

Pliny began his description of Mesopotamia in book 6 with an explicit contrast between the humble, dispersed population of Mesopotamia under the Assyrians and the prosperous, concentrated population under the Macedonians:

All Mesopotamia belonged to the Assyrians, the population scattered in villages except for Babylon and Ninevah. The Macedonians gathered them together in cities because of the fertility of the soil.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Purcell (1990).

²⁶⁰ Strabo 16.1.23.

²⁶¹ Strabo 16.1.28. For a discussion of this route, see Chapter 6.

²⁶² Pliny, *NH* 6.117: "Mesopotamia tota Assyriorum fuit, vicatim dispersa praeter Babylona et Ninum. Macedones eam in urbes congregavere propter ubertatem soli."

Having been primed for the Macedonian transformation of the region, the reader can clearly see the imprint of the Macedonian presence in the Greek and Macedonian dynastic names that follow:

Except for the towns already mentioned, [Mesopotamia] contains Seleucia, Laodicea, Artemita; and in Arabia, the people called the Orroei, and Antiochia of the Mardani, founded by Nicanor, the governor of Mesopotamia, and called Arabis*. [118] Joined to these in the interior are the Eldamari Arabs (beyond whom is the town of Bura near the river Pallaconta) and the Salmani and Masei Arabs. Next to the Gordyaei are the Azoni, through whose territory the river Zerbis runs into the Tigris; next to the Azoni are the Silici, a mountain tribe, and the Orontes, to the west of whom lies the town of Gaugamela, as also Suae among the rocks. Beyond the Silici are the Sitrae through whose district the river Lycus flows out of Armenia, south-east of Sitrae the town of Azochis, then in the plains the towns of Dios Pege (Zeus' Spring), Polytelia, Stratonice, and Anthemus. [119] In the vicinity of the Euphrates is Nicephorion, which we have mentioned; Alexander ordered it to be built because of the favourableness of the site. Apamea at Zeugma has been mentioned also, from which, heading east, one comes to Caphrena, a fortified town, formerly seventy stadia in size and called the "Palace of the Satraps." Tribute used to be brought here; now it is just a fortress. [120] Thebata is still in the same state as formerly, and Oruros, the limit of Roman power under Pompeius Magnus, 250 miles from Zeugma.²⁶³

In addition to the cities which simply bear witness to Macedonian rule through their names (such as Seleucia, Laodicea, and Apamea), Pliny singles out for specific comment the foundations of "Arabian" Antiochia and Nicephorion;

263 Pliny, *NH* 6.117–120: "Oppida praeter iam dicta habet Seleuciam, Laodiceam, Artemitam; item in Arabum gente qui Orroei vocantur et Mandani Antiochiam quae a praefecto Mesopotamiae Nicanore condita Arabis vocatur. [118] Iunguntur his Arabes introrsus Eldamari, supra quos ad Pallacontam flumen Bura oppidum, Salmani et Masei Arabes; Gurdiaei vero iuncti Azoni, per quos Zerbis fluvius in Tigrim eadit, Azonis Silices montani et Orontes, quorum ad occidentem oppidum Gaugamela, item Suae in rupibus. Supra Silicas Sitrae, per quos Lycus ex Armenia fertur, ab Sitris ad hibernum exortum Azochis oppidum, mox in campestribus oppida Dios Pege, Polytelia, Stratonicea, Anthemus. [119] In vicinia Euphratis Nicephorion, quod diximus; Alexander iussit condi propter loci opportunitatem. Dicta est et in Zeugmate Apamea; ex qua orientem petentes excipit oppidum Caphrena munitum, quondam stadiorum LXX amplitudine et Satraparum Regia appellatum quo tributa conferebantur, nunc in arcem redactum. [120] durant, ut fuere, Thebata et, ductu Pompei Magni terminus Romani imperi, Oruros, a Zeugmate CCL."

the former by Nicanor (“a praefecto Mesopotamiae Nicanore condita”) and the latter by Alexander (“Alexander iussit condi propter loci opportunitatem”). The landscape was *made* Macedonian.

Ammianus had a much better understanding of the space of the Mesopotamian Borderland, both through the gradual accumulation of available knowledge of a now imperial province and through his detailed personal experience of the area, yet some conceptions of the historical geography of the Mesopotamian Borderland remained from the beginning of the Roman period. The conception of the Macedonian conquest as a civilising movement persisted. Ammianus made much the same claim as Pliny in his description of the eastern frontier regions:

But the frontier of the East, extending a long distance in a straight line, reaches from the banks of the Euphrates to the borders of the Nile, bounded on the left by the Saracen peoples and open on the right to the waves of the sea. Seleucus Nicator took possession of the region and greatly increased it in power, when, after the death of Alexander of Macedon, he was holding the rule of Persia by right of succession; a capable and successful king, as his surname [Nicator] indicates. [6] For he took advantage of the great number of men whom he ruled for a long time in peace, and built cities that were secure in wealth and power out of their rustic dwellings. Now most of these are called by the Greek names which their founder imposed upon them, nevertheless have not lost the original names which their ancient settlers gave them in the Assyrian language.²⁶⁴

In this appeal to the Macedonian development of now-Roman provinces, Ammianus’ account strongly resembles the description of Mesopotamia in Pliny’s 6th book. Like Pliny, Ammianus begins the history of the space with the Macedonian conquest and Seleucus’ inheritance and development of the region. The Achaemenid Persians appear only as Alexander’s defeated

264 Amm. Marc. 14.8.5–6: “orientis vero limes in longum protentus et rectum ab Euphratis fluminis ripis ad usque supercilia porrigitur Nili, laeva Saracenis conterminans gentibus, dextra pelagi fragoribus patens, quam plagam Nicator Seleucus occupatam auxit magnum in modum, cum post Alexandri Macedonis obitum successorio iure teneret regna Persidis, efficaciae inpetrabilis rex, ut indicat cognomentum. [6] Abusus enim multitudine hominum, quam tranquillis in rebus diutius rexit, ex agrestibus habitaculis urbes construxit multis opibus firmas et viribus, quarum ad praesens pleraeque licet Graecis nominibus appellentur, quae isdem ad arbitrium inposita sunt conditoris, primigenia tamen nomina non amittunt, quae eis Assyria lingua institutores veteres indiderunt.” Jonge (1972) 64–67.

opponents. Ammianus casts the Macedonian conquest as a positive influence on the region (*plagam Nicator Seleucus occupatam auxit magnum*), implicitly equating wealth with urbanisation (*ex agrestibus habitaculis urbes construxit multis opibus firmas et viribus*). This equation fits with the Roman ideal of provincial organisation.

Despite these visions of a Macedonian landscape, two of the most important sites in Mesopotamia retained their local names despite the presence of Macedonian colonists. The main city of the Mygdonians was Nisibis, a city refounded by a Seleucid as Antiocheia in Mygdonia.²⁶⁵ This important local centre had a Macedonian name which never appears as the primary toponym of the city. Here, as with many Antiochs, the Macedonian name did not stick, either because of the strength of local traditions or because of the need to differentiate among a superfluity of Antiochs. Nevertheless, both Strabo and Pliny report that name.²⁶⁶ To the east, Carrhae apparently received colonists in the Macedonian period. These either retained, or were plausibly able to claim, sufficient numbers and philhellenism to support the legions of Afranius and Crassus when they passed through the area in 65 and 54–53 BCE respectively.²⁶⁷ Both Strabo and Pliny mention the town, but not the Hellenistic colonists; instead they recall Crassus' defeat.²⁶⁸

Finally, it should be remembered that most of the cities of northern Mesopotamia lay within the area which both authors call Mygdonia. This name, the same as a river in Macedonia and related to a Homeric hero, was most likely an *interpretatio Graecae* for the Semitic name of some local political, social or cultural group. Pliny is explicit on the Macedonian renaming of the space:

265 Strabo 16.1.23: "...ή Νίσιβις, ήν και αυτήν Αντιόχειαν τήν έν τή Μυγδονία προσηγόρευσαν...". See also Strabo's initial survey of the Fertile Crescent (16.1.1) where he calls the Mygdonians "τούς περι Νίσιβιν Μυγδόνας".

266 Strabo 16.1.23; Pliny *NH* 6.42. But see Pliny *NH* 6.117 where "Mardani Antiochiam" might be a distorted form of Mygdonian Antioch. See Chapter 5.

267 Dio 37.5.5: (Afranius, returning through Mesopotamia to Syria, contrary to the agreement made with the Parthian, wandered from the way and encountered many hardships by reason of the winter and the lack of supplies. Indeed his troops would have perished, had not the Carrhaeans, Macedonian colonists who dwelt somewhere in that vicinity, received him and helped him forward.) Loeb trans. Dio 40.13.1. See Arnaud (1986).

268 Pliny *NH* 5.86: "Carrhas, Crassi clade nobile." Although Strabo does not mention Crassus in direct apposition with Carrhae, but rather with Sinnaca shortly after. Strabo 16.1.23: "τά περι Κάρρας και Νικηφόριον χωρία και Χορδίραζα και Σίννακα, έν ή Κράσσος διεφθάρη, δόλω ληφθείς υπό Σουρήνα του των Παρθυαίων στρατηγού."

The kingdom of the Persians, which we now know as that of the Parthians, was established on the heights of the Caucasus Mountains, between two seas, the Persian and Hyrcanian. As I said, Cephonia is joined to Greater Armenia on both sides by steep slopes running towards the front part which faces Commagene, and to this, Adiabene, where the land of the Assyrians begins, of which the part closest to Syria is Arbelitis, where Alexander defeated Darius. The Macedonians have named this all Mygdonia from its similarity [to Mygdonia in Macedon]. Its towns are Alexandria and Antiochia, which they call Nesebis; it is 750 m.p. from Artaxata. Ninos (Nineveh), placed on the Tigris looking to the west, was once very famous.²⁶⁹

Pliny is imprecise on the exact bounds of the area which the Macedonians named Mygdonia. By including Adiabene, he certainly referred to a slightly different area than Strabo, but the Macedonian focus is clear in both the naming of the region and the major cities he includes within it: Alexandria and Antioch “quam Nesebin vocant”. On this note of the colonial renaming of a site closely associated with a Mesopotamian population, we will shift focus to the mobile geography of the Mesopotamian Borderland.

269 Pliny *NH* 6.41–42: “Namque Persarum regna, quae nunc Parthorum intellegimus, inter duo maria Persicum et Hyrcanium Caucasi iugis attolluntur. utrimque per devexa laterum Armeniae Maiori a frontis parte, quae vergit in Commagenen, Cephonia, ut diximus, copulatur eique Adiabene, Assyriorum initium, cuius pars est Arbelitis, ubi Darium Alexander debellavit, proxime Syriae. [42] totam eam Macedones Mygdoniam cognominaverunt a similitudine. oppida Alexandria, item Antiochia quam Nesebin vocant; abest ab Artaxatis DCCL [m.]p. fuit et Ninos, inposita Tigri, ad solis occasum spectans, quondam clarissima.”

Moving

Movement is fundamental to the way the Roman imperial geographical writers describe the space of the Mesopotamian Borderland. At a methodological level, movement is fundamental to the process of geographical knowledge production itself. Whether one considers the collection of geographical material by autopsy or by second-hand reporting, geographical knowledge comes to the writer's mind through movement in one of two ways: a) the writer moves through space and observes with his own senses, or b) the sensory experiences of others' spatial movement travels through space to the writer, either in the form of a reporter or of a written report. The Roman imperial geographical writers used material collected by both autopsy and scholarship. Methodological statements preferring either method, such as those discussed in Chapter 2, make claims to membership or authority within a group, genre or field. Being so deeply engaged with movement at a methodological level, it is perhaps no surprise that their geographical narratives show a conception of the world as a dynamic space of action.¹ One way in which this dynamism manifested was by the incorporation of non-fixed geographical features, namely population groups, into the narrative.

Geography and ethnography often overlap in ancient writing. While none of the authors who describe Mesopotamia give detailed ethnographic digressions about the peoples of the Mesopotamian Borderland, each author mentions groups of people and their activities. This chapter examines who those people are and how they are described through identity and action. By examining whether the names are applied consistently between geographic texts, we can also see the growth of geographical knowledge about the Mesopotamian Borderland in the Roman world.

We have already seen how the Roman imperial geographical writers used ethnonyms to denominate broad areas and sub areas within the Mesopotamian Borderland. For the Mesopotamian Borderland, this is particularly evident in the case of our two most detailed narrative texts. Strabo included the entire borderland within a culturally defined space, οἱ Ἀσσύριοι "land of the Assyrians", which encompassed the Aramaic-speaking world from Nabataean Arabia to Babylonia. Within this space, he divided Syria, Mesopotamia, Adiabene and

¹ Chapter 6 examines the role of long range commercial action in their conception of the borderland.

Babylonia along primarily geographical lines, based on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. Within Mesopotamia itself, the cultural perspective returned. Each of the three areas into which he divided the region are defined in relation to an ethnic group: the Mygdonians, the Gordyaeans, and the Skenitai Arabs.² These groups are characterised by the narrative of the spaces they occupy. The Mygdonians are portrayed as somewhat Hellenised city-dwellers surrounded by less civilised peoples. The Gordyaeans are mountain people with fortified strongholds. The Skenitai are fluid and mobile, as ambiguous and elusive as the arid and unnamed pastoral lands they inhabit. Pliny defined Mesopotamia as a geographical area, but implicitly discussed Syria according to its political status as a Roman space. Moreover, he presented Roman Syria and non-Roman Mesopotamia as overlapping spaces. These two spaces are also differentiated along cultural lines to a certain degree: many of the Syrian groups are presented as urban, while many of those in Mesopotamia are ethnic or tribal. In these works, the population of the Mesopotamian Borderland can be roughly divided into two types: mobile peoples (pastoralists and nomads) and sedentary people. The names of both types mark the land as ethnonyms.

1 Skenitai

Nomadic pastoralists were of particular interest to relations of movement and control in the Mesopotamian frontier region. Donner identifies three “ideal types” of nomadic pastoralism in the Near East: transhumance, sheep and goat nomadism, and camel nomadism.³ Transhumance is the practice of moving flocks (primarily sheep and goats) between summer pastures, high in the mountains, and winter pastures in low-lying areas of the plains or foothills.⁴ They usually follow well-defined routes and have customary agreements with villages along them. The second type involves the seasonal movement of sheep and goat flocks from the arid margins of river valleys to the more well-watered riverine areas. Because those areas are more densely populated with sedentary

2 Strabo 16.1.1: the tribes of Mesopotamia near the Gordyaeans (τὰ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας ἔθνη τὰ περὶ Γορδυαίους), the Mygdonians around Nisibis as far as Zeugma (τοὺς περὶ Νίσιβιν Μυγδόνες μέχρι τοῦ Ζεύγματος τοῦ κατὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην), and the Arabians on the other side of the Euphrates (τῆς πέραν τοῦ Εὐφράτου πολλὴ ἦν Ἀραβες κατέχουσι). These groups are discussed in Chapter 4, the “land of the Assyrians” is discussed in Chapter 3.

3 Donner (1989) 74–75.

4 Strabo alludes to the presence of this kind of livelihood when he describes the Cossaeans, Paraetaceni and Elymaeans in the Zagros Mountains, some of whom dwell in the parts of the country that are not fertile, Strabo 16.1.18.

inhabitants, the nomads have intimate social ties with the villagers.⁵ This is the type of pastoralism practised in the river valleys of the Tigris, the Euphrates and their tributaries. The final type is primarily based around the herding of camels. The biology of the camel allows longer journeys through much more arid and unpopulated areas, such as the Syrian and Arabian deserts.⁶ This kind of nomadism involves infrequent contact with other groups, settled or nomadic. By and large, the geographical sources do not clearly represent the types of pastoralism practised in the Mesopotamian Borderland. Evidence of the use of camels and desert travel suggests camel nomadism.⁷ References to grazing on marginal land suggests small herd animals.⁸ There is no evidence of seasonal cycles of herd movement that would suggest transhumance, although this was probably practised in the foothills of the Taurus. However, it is important to note that because of a long history of prejudice by sedentary against non-sedentary people, the depiction of such groups in the sources is problematic.⁹

Nomadic groups (οἱ σκηνῖται. “tent-dwellers”) are present throughout Strabo’s presentation of the Near East.¹⁰ They inhabit (κατέχουσιν) the entire area of the Syrian steppe south of Babylonia, Mesopotamia and Syria, and north of the more extreme Syrian desert (ὕπὲρ δὲ τούτων ἔρημός ἐστι πολλή).¹¹ Despite being a definitively peripheral people in Strabo, the Skenitai are an important factor in each of the regions they touch. They are divided into small autonomous groups (δυναστείας ἀποτετμημένοι μικράς)¹² and live by pastoralism of various kinds (“νομάς δὲ ἔχοντες παντοδαπῶν θρεμμάτων καὶ μάλιστα καμήλων”, “ποιμενικοί”) on marginal land (“ἐν λυπροῖς χωρίοις διὰ τὰς ἀνυδρίας”, their land in Mesopotamia is “ἄνυδρα καὶ λυπρά”).¹³ They are nomadic (“μεθιστάμενοι ῥαδίως εἰς ἄλλους τόπους, ὅταν ἐπιλείψωσιν αἱ νομαὶ καὶ αἱ λεηλασίαι”, “Σκηνῖται οἱ νομάδες”) but they do practice a small amount of farming (γεωργοῦντες μὲν ἢ οὐδὲν ἢ μικρά), either a reference to semi-nomadic groups or to the practice of

5 On cooperation between pastoral and sedentary people: Hoyland (2001) 98–99. On the ambiguity between those groups: Hoyland (2001) 101–2.

6 For a fascinating technological history of the camel, see Bulliet (1977). For a discussion of the relationship between camel nomads and Palmyrene trade networks, see Seland (2015b).

7 Especially Strabo 16.1.27.

8 Especially Strabo 16.1.26.

9 Shaw (1995a); Hoyland (2001) 96–97.

10 Babylonia: 16.1.8. Mesopotamia: 16.1.26–28. Syria: 16.2.11. Arabia: Strabo 16.3.1.

11 Strabo 16.3.1.

12 On the types of community groups in nomadic societies, Kradin (2002) 126–38.

13 Strabo 16.3.1; 16.1.26.

planting certain crops in oases to be harvested after periodic rainfalls.¹⁴ Some practice banditry (ληστροικοί), others are peaceful (εἰρήνην).¹⁵

Strabo's broad category of Skenitai includes a number of different tribal units, occupying different areas, and in quite different relations with their various neighbours. These differences are apparent to us and may have been apparent to Strabo, too, but he was content to use οἱ σκηνῖται to refer to this broad group in different places of his narration. While Strabo gives a reasonable amount of information about these people, his attitude illustrates the weakness of our sources in this respect: authors from sedentary societies are seldom precise when dealing with pastoralist groups. Furthermore, Strabo's observation that the population of the Syrian interior are "more civilised the closer they are to the Syrians" (ἀεὶ δ' οἱ πλησιαιτέροι τοῖς Σύροις ἡμερώτεροι καὶ ἦττον Ἀραβες καὶ σκηνῖται), as well as illustrating the prejudice of the sedentary writer for the mobile culture, disguises the fact that nomadic pastoralism exists on a continuum.¹⁶ There was usually a pastoralist element to the otherwise sedentary people on the fringes of the arable zones, an element that would have increased in proportion as the land became more marginal.¹⁷ Because of their network of connections to other nomadic and sedentary groups across the Fertile Crescent, the liminal Skenitai played an important role in Strabo's conception of the borderland between Roman Syria and Parthian Babylonia. The lifeways of nomads and sedentary peoples might seem quite disparate, but an examination of their structure reveals deep similarities.¹⁸ To do so, let us consider the control of territory by population groups.

14 Strabo 16.3.1; 16.1.26; 16.1.28. On the practice of cultivation by nomadic pastoralists, Macdonald (1993) 316–17; Hoyland (2001) 89.

15 Strabo 16.1.26; 16.1.27.

16 Strabo 16.2.11: "Ὅμορος δ' ἐστὶ τῇ Ἀπαμέων πρὸς ἔω μὲν ἢ τῶν φυλάρχων Ἀράβων καλουμένη Παραποταμία καὶ ἡ Χαλκιδικὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ Μασσίου καθήκουσα καὶ πᾶσα ἢ πρὸς νότον τοῖς Ἀπαμεύσιν, ἀνδρῶν σκηνιτῶν τὸ πλεόν. παραπλήσιοι δ' εἰσὶ τοῖς ἐν τῇ Μεσοποταμίᾳ νομάσιν. ἀεὶ δ' οἱ πλησιαιτέροι τοῖς Σύροις ἡμερώτεροι καὶ ἦττον Ἀραβες καὶ σκηνῖται, ἡγεμονίας ἔχοντες συντεταγμένους μᾶλλον, καθάπερ ἡ Σαμψικεράμου καὶ ἡ Γαμβάρου καὶ ἡ Θέμελλα καὶ ἄλλων τοιούτων." (Bordering on the land of the Apameians, to the east, is the land of Arab chieftains called Parapotamia as also Chalcidice coming down from Massyas, and all the country to the south of the Apameians, which is full of tent-dwelling (*Skenitai*) people. These are similar to the nomads in Mesopotamia. For those nearer to the Syrians are always more civilised, and the Arabs and *Skenitai* less so, having leadership that is better organised, such as Sampsiceramus, Gambarus, Themellas, and other such rulers.) Radt (2002) 8.297. On Strabo's conception of relative "civilisation" as a continuum, see below.

17 Donner (1989) 75. Macdonald (1993) 315 writes that "in the Near East it is rare to find populations which are *purely* pastoralist or *purely* agriculturalist" (MacDonald's emphasis).

18 This is not to discount the very real differences in culture and outlook that frequent and repeated mobility instills.

1.1 *Nodes and Corridors*

The notion of a territory across which a group's power is evenly present, available and applicable is a rhetorical fiction.¹⁹ Recent theorists of state and imperial control have begun to consider state power using a network model wherein power is disseminated from points in the landscape and is communicated and enforced along links between those nodes.²⁰ Anthropologist Monica Smith argues that a network model drawn from biological patterns of animal behaviours can improve our understanding of the internal dynamics of empires and states.²¹ The core of the comparison rests on resource scarcity. Resources are not evenly distributed in nature. Animals spend most of their energy (an internal resource) claiming nodes of external resources and the connective corridors which allow movement between those nodes. They spend comparatively few resources maintaining territorial boundaries around that resource-movement network. More complex animals require larger networks spanning wider territories to satisfy all their resource requirements. The security of resources and resource exploitation within this network is a priority, not the security of territory as such. This is a flexible and energy efficient approach to landscape use with clear applications to the internal dynamics of organised human groups.

Like other animals, human groups depend on resources for survival. Smith argues that people think in terms of resource nodes rather than homogeneous spaces.²² Groups focus their internal resources at points where valued external resources are able to be collected, while areas of lesser value are invested with fewer group resources. In other words, a group's power is focused on the spaces it values the most. Spaces it does not value as highly are more open to alternative expressions of power, such as local autonomy or the power of a rival group. In considering complex human societies, our definition of resource can be expanded.

A population group or state's internal resources can be administrative, economic, military, ideological, and so on, while the required external resources

19 Elden (2013) traces ideas about "territory" from the Greek world to the Modern era.

20 Wilkinson (2002); Smith (2005) 838; Smith (2007). Sociologists have long recognised the power of networks as an explanatory model for various social phenomena: for example, Stark and Bainbridge (1985); Mann (1986) 1–3. For a very approachable account of the history of network analysis, see Barabási (2003). Recent ancient historical approaches include: Malkin (2011); Schor (2011).

21 Smith (2007) 29.

22 Smith (2007) 31. On movement between resource centres in a heterogeneous environment, see Johnson (1977) 488–94. In the context of pastoralist movement, see Turner (1999).

include human labour, food production, and the legitimization of existing power structures.²³ The fewer internal resources that are available to the state in the region in question, the more such a model applies.²⁴ Those resources will tend to be focused at certain sites or areas and absent elsewhere. Such a model is particularly appropriate in areas where the predominant terrain is of lesser value to the controlling state. In such areas, instruments of domination such as administrative and judicial centres, ideological resources, and military units are spread more thinly and in lower concentration, so power is less able to be universally applied. This is not to say that state power only exists where state resources are present; the ability to project force and threaten intervention means that state power radiates from those points depending on the degree to which the inhabitants of more distant locations respect the ability and will of that state to exercise compulsion, or the degree to which they desire the benefits which that state can offer.²⁵ The resources which ensure the state's survival are more important than the maintenance of territorial boundaries. Boundary definition might still be an important consideration for states at particular times and in particular places, but a defended boundary is an external resource which is subject to the same selective considerations as any others within a state.

The subject of the previous paragraphs has transitioned from "groups" to "states" deliberately. A state is simply a highly organised group. The considerations that apply to a nomadic band with cultural, social and kinship connections to other groups using a space apply in the same way to the states that claim to "control" the territory through which these nomadic groups move.

23 In fact, any of the sources of social power discussed by Mann (1986) apply.

24 Smith (2005) 844: "With limited resources to expend, central authorities assembling an initial state-level bureaucratic apparatus should have been particularly focused on the efficient use of nodes as places of investment that could be linked through cost-effective corridors of transport and communication." Sinopoli (1994) 171–72. This idea underlies the "central place theory" described in general by Johnson (1977) 494–501 and applied to Seleucid Syria by Grainger (1990) 91–136.

25 Wilkinson et al. (2005) 24. Stein (1999) suggests that geographical distance is a major factor in inter-regional network variation (p.58). He criticises Wallerstein's world-system model of core-periphery interaction (pp. 10–43) and proposes a distance-parity model for interactions between a distant imperial core and the local regions it seeks to influence, control or dominate, which puts the focus on the region itself rather than on the core. In this model, as distance to the core increases, parity between imperial and local interests increases. This model also applies at the intra-regional scale where nodes in a local network correspond to local "cores", i.e. the influence of a given node decreases as distance increases (pp. 175–76). This idea also underlies the experimentation with "gravity models" in archaeology, Johnson (1977) 481–87.

The network theory of state formation and function applies even more clearly to mobile groups which make no claims to “territory” as such.²⁶ Smith’s node and corridor model of landscape use is especially relevant for considering the movement of the pastoralist groups of the Jazira and north Syria desert.²⁷ The nodes of such a network of movement include water sources and locations where grazing or farming was possible. Nomadic groups move along the corridors between these sites as necessary. In Strabo’s presentation, we might also consider sites of potential banditry (such as villages, towns and routes of commercial movement) as resource nodes in this system. Thinking of these sites as nodes serves as a reminder of the potentially overlapping nature of networks of control and the potential for relations between those networks ranging from symbiotic to hostile. Strabo dwells on the hostile relationships with his focus on Skenitai banditry and the oppression (καταδυναστεύουσι) of the settled communities of Mygdonia.²⁸

Strabo’s *Geography* shows the networks linking the Skenitai to each other and to local sedentary groups at three levels: local, regional, and inter-imperial. At the local level, Strabo shows numerous interactions between Skenitai groups, travellers and local urban communities along the Euphrates. In Strabo’s description of merchants travelling through the southern parts of Mesopotamia, the Skenitai along the Euphrates extract moderate tolls from travellers, mediated by local caravan guides who no doubt maintained a considerable number of links to the Skenitai groups whose networks they interacted with.²⁹ Those Skenitai probably also played a role in the maintenance of the water stations along the Euphrates route. At the regional level, Strabo’s description of the Jazira shows interactions on a political and military level between these Skenitai and other local communities of the borderland:

The Skenitai Arabs occupy those parts of Mesopotamia which incline towards the south and are farther from the mountains, and are waterless and barren. [The Skenitai] are bandits and shepherds, who readily move from place to place when pasture and booty fail them. As a result, the people near the mountains are harassed by the Skenitai and also by the Armenians, who dwell above them and oppress them through brute force. They are subject mostly to the Armenians or else to the Parthians,

26 Turner (1999).

27 Smith (2007) 31.

28 Strabo 16.1.26.

29 Strabo 16.1.27. These interactions are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

who, possessing both Media and Babylonia, are situated on the sides of the country.³⁰

The movement of the Skenitai from node to node in response to local resource shortages is apparent in this passage. So too are the antagonistic regional relationships between the Skenitai and the cities of Mygdonia (τοῖς παρορείοις).³¹ Finally, at the inter-imperial level, Strabo's description of the border between Rome and Parthia shows the connections between the Skenitai tribes and the two empires:

The Euphrates and the land beyond it constitute the boundary of the Parthian Empire. But the parts this side of the river are held by the Romans and the chieftains of the Arabians as far as Babylonia, some of the chieftains preferring to give ear to the Parthians and others to the Romans, to whom they are neighbours; less so the nomad Skenitai who are near the river, but more so those that are far away and near Arabia Felix.³²

The Skenitai occupy a nebulous political position between Rome and Parthia, with some attached to (προσέχοντες) each empire. Strabo uses the terms phylarch and Arab (here: τῶν Ἀράβων οἱ φύλαρχοι) to refer to both sedentary and mobile people and populations. In this passage, he collapses all the Arab groups of the region, including Skenitai, Euphrates communities, and presumably any settled communities which existed further from the river (including places like Palmyra and Hatra) into a general category which he characterises as partially linked to Roman power and partially linked to Parthian power. By aggregating these groups together, he implies that the component groups were also linked by a considerable number of social and political bonds, which was certainly the case.

30 Strabo 16.1.26: “ἐν τοῖς Συριακοῖς αὐτίκα. τὰ δὲ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν κεκλιμένα τῆς Μεσοποταμίας καὶ ἀπωτέρω τῶν ὁρῶν ἄνδρα καὶ λυπρὰ ὄντα ἔχουσιν οἱ σκηνῖται Ἀραβες, ληστρικοὶ τινες καὶ ποιμενικοί, μεριστάμενοι ῥαδίως εἰς ἄλλους τόπους, ὅταν ἐπιλείπωσιν αἱ νομαὶ καὶ αἱ λεηλασίαι. τοῖς οὖν παρορείοις ὑπὸ τε τούτων κακοῦσθαι συμβαίνει καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀρμενίων· ὑπέρκεινται δὲ καὶ καταδυναστεύουσι διὰ τὴν ἰσχύ· τέλος δ' ὑπ' ἐκείνοις εἰσὶ τὸ πλεόν ἢ τοῖς Παρθυαίοις· ἐν πλευραῖς γάρ εἰσι κάκεῖνοι τὴν τε Μηδίαν ἔχοντες καὶ τὴν Βαβυλωνίαν.”

31 For the possible, and for my purposes here, functional, equivalence between ἡ παρόρειος and Mygdonia in Strabo's narrative, see Chapter 4.

32 Strabo 16.1.28: “Ὅριον δ' ἐστὶ τῆς Παρθυαίων ἀρχῆς ὁ Εὐφράτης καὶ ἡ περαία· τὰ δ' ἐντὸς ἔχουσι Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ τῶν Ἀράβων οἱ φύλαρχοι μέχρι Βαβυλωνίας, οἱ μὲν μᾶλλον ἐκείνοις οἱ δὲ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις προσέχοντες, οἷσπερ καὶ πλησιόχωροί εἰσιν, ἦττον μὲν Σκηνῖται οἱ νομάδες οἱ τῷ ποταμῷ πλησίον, μᾶλλον δ' οἱ ἀπωθεν καὶ πρὸς τῇ εὐδαίμονι Ἀραβίᾳ.”

1.2 *Controlling Mobile Populations*

One of the major issues confronting the Roman administration on the fringes of the eastern provinces seems to have been control of banditry by mobile peoples.³³ Among the allies of Caecilius Bassus, the Pompeian who seized Apamea in 47 BCE, was Alchaedamnus, “king of the Rhambaeans, nomads on this side of the Euphrates” (ὁ τῶν Ῥαμβαίων βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐντὸς τοῦ Εὐφράτου νομάδων). Alchaedamnus had been a friend of the Romans (φίλος Ῥωμαίων), but when he thought himself treated unjustly by the governors (τῶν ἡγεμόνων), he relocated to Mesopotamia, from where he was still able to support Bassus in his revolt.³⁴ This ability for nomadic groups to move within, out of, or into imperial territory and thus evade control was problematic for the administration of the Roman provinces of the Near East. Sartre discusses Roman attempts to control nomadic groups in Syria, especially by building outposts in increasingly isolated oases.³⁵ However, these attempts to control nomadic groups were not a defensive measure. There is little mention of raiding before the mid-third century and the threat of nomads to the sedentary population was mostly a historiographical assumption based on much later evidence, including from the colonial period.³⁶

The geographical sources provide little evidence of attempts to control pastoralists. Strabo mentions the mobility and banditry of the Skenitai in Mesopotamia and Syria but gives no indication of any means by which regional or imperial powers attempted to prevent or control those movements or depoliations. Pliny only refers to the Skenitai and other presumably pastoral (or partially pastoral) groups as static entities in his catalogue of Roman and non-Roman space. Smith suggests that the relatively low and diffuse value of pastoral areas as a resource, as well as the difficulty of exerting control over such wide spaces, meant that these areas were often left alone by imperial powers.³⁷ Does the lack of information provided by our geographical sources indicate that the states of the Mesopotamian Borderland took no efforts to control pastoralists? Probably not. Other sources suggest that there were attempts to control such

33 This concern was not unique to the Roman East. For attempts to control pastoralists in Mauretania Tingitana, see Shaw (1986).

34 Strabo 16.2.10: τῶν δὲ συμμαχοῦντων τῷ Βάσσῳ ἦν καὶ Ἀλχαΐδαμνος, ὁ τῶν Ῥαμβαίων βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐντὸς τοῦ Εὐφράτου νομάδων: ἦν δὲ φίλος Ῥωμαίων, ἀδικεῖσθαι δὲ νομίσας ὑπὸ τῶν ἡγεμόνων, ἐκπεσὼν εἰς τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν ἐμισθοφόρει τότε τῷ Βάσσῳ. Biffi (2002) 189–90. Bassus’ rebellion and the Caesarian reaction: Livy *Per.* 114; Dio 47.26.3–27.1; Joseph. *AJ* 14.268; *BJ* 1.216; App. *BCiv.* 3.77, 4.58. Sherwin-White (1984) 301–2.

35 Sartre (2005) 233–39; Macdonald (1993).

36 Graf (1989).

37 Smith (2007) 33.

groups. At Palmyra, the office of *strategos* had a role in controlling nomads.³⁸ An honorific inscription erected in Palmyra in 199 CE attests to the activity of a *strategos* against the nomads (κατὰ τῶν νομάδων στρατηγίας).³⁹ Smith suggests that the lack of evidence for military activity against nomads before this late date indicates that the nomads of the North Syrian desert profited from Palmyra's command of the desert routes and only resorted to banditry when wars disrupted trade and reduced their income.⁴⁰ This would be a similar case to that described by Strabo for the Euphrates route. If so, then Palmyra controlled the desert tribes through some form of economic distribution, either allowing a degree of direct taxation on passing caravans, or indirectly, by passing on some of the profits from the trade in some other form to those nomads. The presence of Palmyrene guards and garrisons in a number of important caravan termini across the region, including Dura Europus, Hit, and other cities on the Parthian parts of the Euphrates, suggests that this economic control was not sufficient to entirely remove the risk of banditry.⁴¹ In Osrhoene, a religious site called Sumatar Harabesi bears epigraphic evidence of a "governor of 'Arab'" (ⲉⲗⲁⲃⲁⲃⲉⲛⲁⲣⲁⲃⲉⲥ).⁴² 'Arab' refers to a region to the east of the kingdom, although its exact bounds are unclear.⁴³ This was probably a post established by the king at Edessa to control pastoralist groups in this eastern region.

The Skenitai are explicitly characterised by movement and nomadism. Other cases are not so clear. In Roman imperial geographical texts, ethnonyms could denote a population group at any point on the spectrum between fully nomadic and fully sedentary. Geographical movement does not occur in a vacuum. It is predicated upon origin and destination points (whether planned or not, and they often were) and the medium through which the movement takes place and with which the mobile people interact. The history, lifeways and spatial experience of mobile and sedentary people using the same space are always intertwined.⁴⁴

38 The term *skenitai* was imprecise and inclusive of a wide array of pastoralists in and at the edges of the sedentary communities of Syria, Mesopotamia and Babylonia, including Palmyra: Seland (2014b) 204. Sommer (2016) 14–15 cautions against a simplistic view of the relationship between Palmyrene elites (and the sedentary community, generally) and related nomadic communities.

39 Smith (2013) 129–30. *PAT* 1378.

40 Smith (2013) 144–45. Gawlikowski also argues that nomadic tribes were complicit in Palmyra's trade activities, Gawlikowski (1983) 66; Gawlikowski (1994) 31–32.

41 Both the Euphrates route and Palmyra are discussed in Chapter 6.

42 Drijvers (1972); Ross (2001) 39–43; Healey (2009) 228–30, no. 48.

43 Healey (2009) 229.

44 On the complex relationships between mobile and sedentary people see: Khazanov (1984); Batty (2007); Porter (2011).

Several areas were characterized by the presence of these pastoralists. Alchaedamnus and the Rhambaeans were just one of many mobile groups who circulated around inland North Syria:

Bordering on the land of the Apameians, to the east, is the land of Arab chieftains called Parapotamia as also Chalcidice coming down from Massyas, and all the country to the south of the Apameians, which is full of tent-dwelling (*Skenitai*) people. These are similar to the nomads in Mesopotamia. For those nearer to the Syrians are always more civilised, and the Arabs and *Skenitai* less so, having leadership that is better organised, such as Sampsiceramus, Gambarus, Themellas, and other such rulers.⁴⁵

Strabo describes Parapotamia as “a land of Arab chieftains” and the area south of Apamea as “full of *Skenitai*” (Map 5.1). If Pliny’s narrative of the Euphrates gives a southerly itinerary as I have argued, then Pliny locates his *Skenitai* in this same area.⁴⁶ Strabo explicitly notes that the people of this area are “similar” (παραπλήσιοι) to the nomads in Mesopotamia. Strabo is not explicit about the ways the groups differ, but he implies that one difference is their level of “civilisation”. Strabo says that those nearer to Syria are ἡμερώτεροι (“more tame, cultivated, civilised”).⁴⁷ He also implies that they have a “more organised authority” (ἡγεμονίας ἔχοντες συντεταγμένους μάλλον), an ambiguous phrase which for which he gives as examples a number of prominent leaders of mobile groups. He seems to imagine that the greater the personal authority of the leader, the more the group will incline towards “civilisation” (for which we should imagine that Strabo includes some degree of settled life).

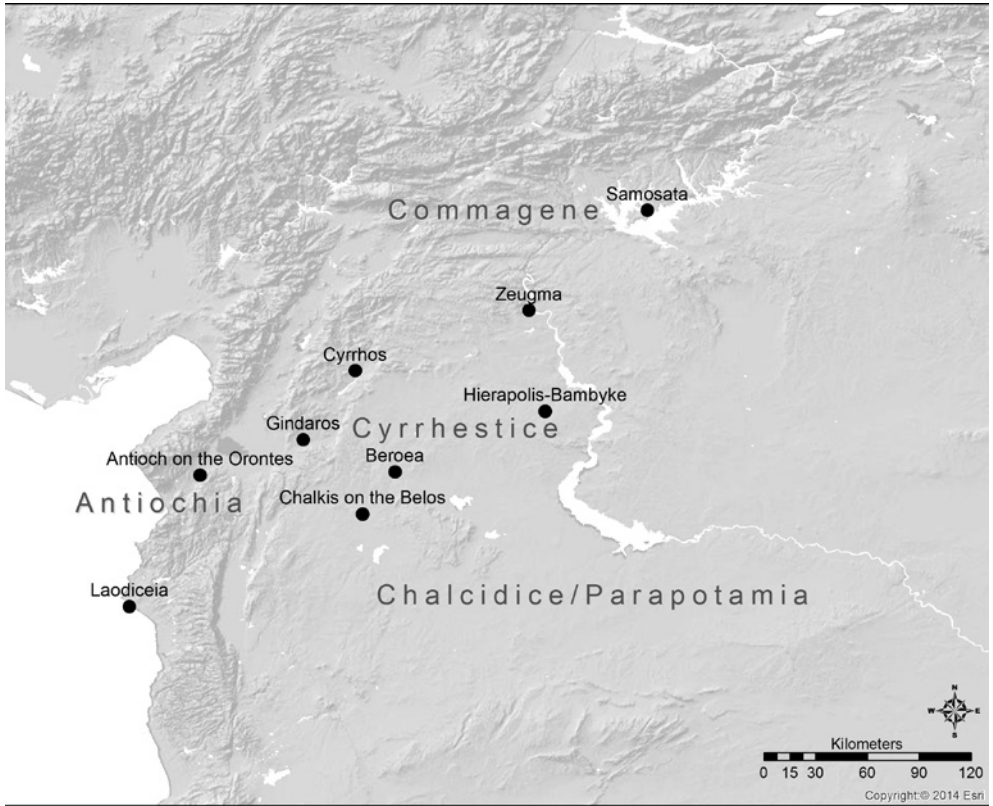
Strabo’s narrative of this sub-region focuses on these ethnographic and political observations about the *Skenitai*. His description omits both the urban settlements and the physical geography of the region.⁴⁸ Instead, the area is described entirely with reference to mobile or potentially mobile people. In placing narrative weight on a non-sedentary people and omitting settlements of sedentary people, Strabo’s description of Chalcidice matches that of the

45 Strabo 16.2.11: “Ὁμορος δ’ ἐστὶ τῇ Ἀπαμέων πρὸς ἑω μὲν ἡ τῶν φυλάρχων Ἀράβων καλουμένη Παραποταμία καὶ ἡ Χαλκιδικὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ Μασσίου καθήκουσα καὶ πᾶσα ἡ πρὸς νότον τοῖς Ἀπαμεύσιν, ἀνδρῶν σκηνιτῶν τὸ πλεόν· παραπλήσιοι δ’ εἰσὶ τοῖς ἐν τῇ Μεσοποταμίᾳ νομάσιν· αἰεὶ δ’ οἱ πλησιαίτεροι τοῖς Σύροις ἡμερώτεροι καὶ ἤττον Ἀραβες καὶ σκηνίται, ἡγεμονίας ἔχοντες συντεταγμένους μάλλον, καθάπερ ἡ Σαμψικεράμου καὶ ἡ Γαμβάρου καὶ ἡ Θέμελλα καὶ ἄλλων τοιούτων.” Radt (2002) 8.297.

46 Pliny *NH* 5.87.

47 see Almagor (2005) 51–53.

48 See Chapter 4.



MAP 5.1 Chalcedice and Parapotamia

southern part of Mesopotamia.⁴⁹ That description of the southern sub-region, which comes earlier in book 16, gives ethnographic detail about the Skenitai, as it does in the description of Chalcedice and Parapotamia. Both sections present a contrast between the mobile activities of the settled world (mercantilism) and those of the nomadic world (pastoralism and banditry). Having already established who the Skenitai are by the time his narrative reaches Chalcedice and Parapotamia, Strabo uses the narrative space to propose a continuum of civilised behaviour between settled (Syrian) and mobile (Skenitai) peoples. Pliny gives no ethnographic (nor indeed *any*) details about the Skenitai he mentions in book 5.⁵⁰

49 Strabo 16.2.26.

50 For a discussion of Pliny's ethnographic outlook, see Murphy (2004) 77–122. It is also of note that he gives no ethnographic detail about the Palmyrenes. In fact, his description of the city does not explicitly link the site or its people to mobility.

Strabo imagined civilization as a continuum running from sedentary to nomadic, but there was ample opportunity for groups in the Mesopotamian Borderland to occupy points in the middle. One group in that liminal space between nomad and sedentary were the Gordyaiaans.

2 Gordyaiaans

Strabo describes Gordyene, the sub-region of Mesopotamia (Map 4.3), using an ethnic descriptive: the territory of the Gordyaiaans (τὰ τῶν Γορδυαίων χωρία):

Near the Tigris are the places of the Gordyaiaans, who were once called Carduchians. Their cities are Sareisa, Satalka and Pinaka, a very strong fortress with three citadels, each fortified by its own walls so that it is a kind of triple city. But the Armenian [king] held it as a subject and the Romans seized it by force, although the Gordyeni had a particular reputation as builders and were skilled in the technologies of siege warfare; for this reason Tigranes employed them in this capacity. The rest of Mesopotamia also came under Roman control and Pompey assigned to Tigranes most of this region – those parts worth mentioning. For the area is rich in pasturage and flourishing, bearing both evergreens and the spice amomum; it is also a feeding ground for lions; and it produces naphtha and the stone gangitis, which reptiles avoid.⁵¹

The area is described primarily in reference to the people who occupy it. Topologically, it is near the Tigris and contains three settlements, one of which was a particularly strong fortress.⁵² This fortification, along with the discussion of their skill in siege warfare, gives the people a war-like character. This attitude towards peoples living in mountainous areas is common in ancient

51 Strabo 16.1.24: “Πρὸς δὲ τῷ Τίγρει τὰ τῶν Γορδυαίων χωρία οὓς οἱ πάλαι Καρδούχους ἔλεγον, καὶ αἱ πόλεις αὐτῶν Σάρεϊσά τε καὶ Σάταλκα καὶ Πίνακα, κράτιστον ἔρυμα, τρεῖς ἄκρας ἔχουσα, ἐκάστην ἰδίῳ τείχει τετειχισμένην, ὥστε οἶον τρίπολιν εἶναι. ἀλλ’ ὅμως καὶ ὁ Ἀρμένιος εἶχεν ὑπήκοον καὶ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι βίᾳ παρέλαβον, καίπερ ἔδοξαν οἱ Γορδυαῖοι διαφερόντως ἀρχιτεκτονικοὶ τινες εἶναι καὶ πολιορκητικῶν ὀργάνων ἐμπειροὶ· διόπερ αὐτοῖς εἰς ταῦτα ὁ Τιγράνης ἐχρήτο. ἐγένετο δὲ καὶ ἡ λοιπὴ Μεσοποταμία ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίοις, Πομπήιος δ’ αὐτῆς τὰ πολλὰ τῷ Τιγράνῃ προσένειμεν ὅσα ἦν ἀξιόλογα· ἔστι γὰρ εὖβοτος ἡ χώρα καὶ εὐερνῆς ὥστε καὶ τὰ ἀειθαλὴ τρέφειν καὶ ἄρωμα τὸ ἄμωμον· καὶ λεοντοβότος ἐστὶ· φέρει δὲ καὶ τὸν νάφθαν καὶ τὴν γαγγήτιν λίθον, ἣν φεύγει τὰ ἑρπετά.” Amomum is an aromatic spice related to cardamom; Biffi (2002) 167.

52 For a discussion of Pinaka (modern Finek, Ammianus’ Phaenicha/Bezabde), see Chapter 4.

ethnography. Strabo describes the three cities of the Gordyaiaans as *poleis* and credits them with a reputation as builders.⁵³ However, Strabo's description of the natural resources of the area dwells on features commonly ascribed to "wild" areas.⁵⁴ In particular, his note that their land is rich in pasturage suggests that pastoralism was a common livelihood in Gordyene.

Strabo's notes that the Gordyaiaans were once called the Carduchians. This name would have been more familiar to Strabo's Greco-Roman audience because of that group's appearance in Xenophon's *Anabasis*.⁵⁵ Strabo's description of the Gordyaiaans as war-like mountain-dwellers was in keeping with Xenophon's characterisation of the Carduchians. In the implication of a pastoral people who retreat to strong fortresses, there is also a certain similarity in Strabo's account to the Bactrian and Sogdian people against whom Alexander campaigned.⁵⁶ Because the "*poleis*" noted by Strabo have yet to be identified or excavated, we have no way of judging the extent to which the Gordyaiaans were a sedentary, urban people as his use of *polis* implies. When Pliny mentions the Gordyaiaans in a list of Mesopotamian peoples, he does not link them to any cities.⁵⁷ Other population groups in this list are linked to rivers, one is linked to Gaugamela, and another is linked to a place called "Suae". Pliny did not associate the Gordyaiaans with any cities, although the role of this list in Pliny's narrative makes it difficult to interpret this omission further or to relate to Strabo's description.⁵⁸

3 Arranging People

Pliny's description of the area of the Mesopotamian Borderland is split between two separate books. As we saw in Chapter 4, his description of "Syria" includes a section reflecting an itinerary down the Euphrates and a description of Osrhoene and other areas east of that river, while his description of the area between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers comes as part of his description

53 There is probably a link between Strabo's conception of the Gordyaiaans as builders (ἀρχιτεκτονικοί, Biffi (2002) 166) and the recent construction of Tigranocerta in the area, although Strabo locates that late-Hellenistic foundation in Mygdonia rather than Gordyene. See below.

54 See Shaw (1995b) 17–19 on Aristotle's five methods of production (*Pol.* 1256a40–41).

55 Xen. *Anab.* 4.3.

56 Arr. *Anab.* 4.1.3–4.7.4, 4.15.7–4.22.2, esp. the rock fortresses 4.18.4–19.4 with Bosworth (1980) 124–30; Diod. 17.85.1–86.2; Curt. Ruf. 7.11.1–9.

57 Pliny *NH* 6.118 (as Gordyaei).

58 See Chapter 7 for the ideological nature of Pliny's Mesopotamian narrative.

of Asia in book 6.⁵⁹ These two narratives overlap in northwest Mesopotamia: both mention the Orroei, Anthemus/Anthemusia and Nikephorion.⁶⁰ Pliny's differential treatment of Syria and Mesopotamia, especially through his representation of the people who inhabit them, reveals his conception of the two spheres of imperial power and implies a political division.⁶¹ Through his selection of material, delimitation of space and boundaries, and the construction of his narrative, Pliny portrays *Provincia Syria* (broadly conceived) as an ordered, predominantly urban Roman space and the bulk of Mesopotamia as a chaotic Parthian space dominated by detached population groups.

Pliny structures his description of Syria according to lists. The main line of the narrative follows the Syrian coast north from Egypt, then the Euphrates south from the Taurus. Much of this narrative is a typically linear description with a clear reliance on a *periplus* style. He diverges from and returns to this structure repeatedly, including a notable section in which he includes two lists of people and places in north Syria detached from the topography of the region:

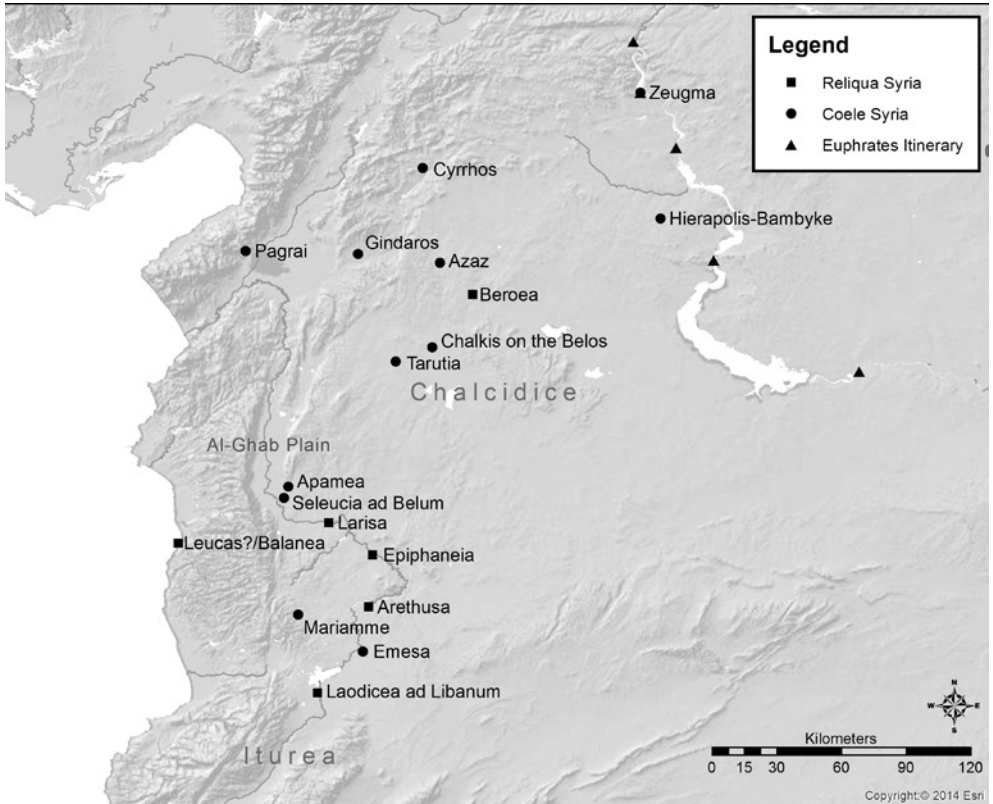
Let the interior now be described. Coele Syria has Apamea, separated from the tetrarchy of the Nazerini by the river Maysa, Bambyke (which is also called Hierapolis, and in fact Mabog by the Syrians – here the monstrous Atargatis is worshipped, called Derceto by the Greeks), Chalcis, named On the Belus, from which the very fertile region of Syria, Chalcidene, is named, and then Cyrrus of Cyrrestica, the Gazetae, Gindareni, Gabeni and the two tetrarchies called Granucomatitae, the Hemeseni, Hylatae, the tribe of Ituraei (and one branch called the Baethaemi), the Mariamnitan, [82] the tetrarchy called Mammisea, Paradisum, Pagrae, Penelenitae, two Seleucias (beyond that already mentioned), one called “on the Euphrates” the other “on the Belus”, and the Tardytenses. The rest of Syria, except for the parts to be addressed with the Euphrates, has the Arethusii, the Beroeenses, the Epiphanenses on the Orontes, the Laodiceans (called “on Lebanon”), the Leucadii, the Larisaeos, and seventeen more tetrarchies with barbarian names divided into kingdoms.⁶²

59 Euphrates itinerary: *NH* 5.86–87. Osrhoene et al.: *NH* 5.85–86. Mesopotamia: *NH* 6.117–120.

60 Orroei: *NH* 5.85, 6.117. Anthemus(ia) and Nikephorion: *NH* 5.86; 6.118.

61 He defines the border in the time of Pompey (*NH* 6.120) and notes that Philiscum is a Parthian city, as if to indicate part of a border (*NH* 5.89).

62 Pliny *NH* 5.81–82: “[81] Nunc interiora dicantur. Coele habet Apameam, Marsya amne divisam a Nazerinorum tetrarchia, Bambyken, quae alio nomine Hierapolis vocatur, Syris vero Mabog – ibi prodigiosa Atargatis, Graecis autem Derceto dicta, colitur –, Chalcidem



MAP 5.2 Pliny's Syria

The first list, Coele Syria, is a mix of ethnonyms and urban settlements. The second, “the rest of Syria” (*reliqua Syria*), is entirely ethnonyms, although most describe urban populations. The urban centres that are directly named and those represented by ethnonyms are placed on Map 5.2. It is clear to see that his “Coele Syria” and “reliqua Syria” do not cover distinct geographical areas. In

cognominatam Ad Belum, unde regio Chalcidena fertilissima Syriae, et inde Cyrresticae Cyrrum, Gazetas, Gindarenos, Gabenos, tetrarchias duas quae Granucomatitae vocantur, Hemesenos, Hylatas, Ituraeorum gentem et qui ex his Baethaemi vocantur, Mariamnitanos, [82] tetrarchiam quae Mammisea appellatur, Paradisum, Pagras, Penelenitas, Seleucias praeter iam dictam duas, quae Ad Euphraten et quae Ad Belum vocantur, Tardytsenses. reliqua autem Syria habet, exceptis quae cum Euphrate dicentur, Arethusios, Beroeenses, Epiphanenses ad Orontem, Laodicenios, qui Ad Libanum cognominantur, Leucadios, Larisaeos, praeter tetrarchias in regna discriptas barbaris nominibus XVII.”

fact, the two lists are atopolological and embellished to disguise their alphabetical nature.

The inclusion of narrative passages that are essentially lists of people and population centres without topological relations between them is explicitly in keeping with Pliny's project, as outlined in the introduction to his geographical section:

The bare names of places will be set down, and with the greatest brevity available, their celebrity and its reasons being deferred to the proper sections; for my topic now is the world as a whole.⁶³

As Murphy has argued, the organisational principle of Pliny's work is to categorise the world opened up to and organised by Roman power.⁶⁴ In his geographical books, Pliny is primarily concerned with listing the "bare names of places" (*locorum nuda nomina*). "Places" in this case includes urban sites which act to anchor nebulous population groups to a map of Roman power. Sometimes it suits his purposes to place these names in topological relation with each other, at others it does not. Because Pliny seeks to give an overview *de toto*, the specific geographical relationships are often unimportant to his project. However, that they be named and listed as subordinate parts of the Roman Empire is valuable to his conception of the whole.

In book 6, Pliny presents two lists of Mesopotamian peoples. The first is a list of Arab peoples that ends somewhere in Babylonia; the second begins near the Tigris on the fringes of Taurus. None of these lists are identified; my labels "list of Arab peoples" and "list of mountain peoples" are derived from the context of the passage.

The first of these spatially linked lists describes several Arab groups that inhabit Mesopotamia proper:

In Arabia, the people called the Orroei, and Antiochia of the Mardani, founded by Nicanor, the governor of Mesopotamia, and called *Arabis*. [118] Joined to these in the interior are the Eldamari Arabs (beyond whom is the town of Bura near the river Pallaconta) and the Salmani and Masei Arabs.⁶⁵

63 Pliny *NH* 3.1–2: "Locorum nuda nomina et quanta dabitur brevitate ponentur, claritate causisque dilatis in suas partes; nunc enim sermo de toto est."

64 Murphy (2004).

65 Pliny *NH* 6.117–120: "Item in Arabum gente qui Orroei vocantur et Mandani Antiochiam quae a praefecto Mesopotamiae Nicanore condita Arabis vocatur. [118] Iunguntur his

It begins with the Orroei, linked to “Antioch of the Mandani” founded by Nicanor. The Orroei were mentioned by Pliny in book 5.⁶⁶ “Mandani” is likely to be an early scribal error for Mygdones, where a cursive YT has become AN.⁶⁷ Thus, the Mandani Antiochia founded by Nicanor is Strabo’s Mygdonian Antiocheia, that is, Nisibis.⁶⁸ The location of the Arab tribes listed by Pliny is difficult to ascertain. Pliny’s Pallaconta River is the Pollacopas Canal, which ran south from Pirisabora (Anbar) to the Arabian Gulf.⁶⁹ The canal is thought to have given its name to the modern town al-Fallūḡa (Fallujah), which lies near the ruins of Anbar. Retsö suggests an identification for Bura from a town near Baghdad mentioned by the thirteenth-century geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi.⁷⁰ This would place the Eldamari Arabs along the north bank of the Euphrates between Osrhoene and Pallaconta/Fallūḡa and the Salmani and Masei further south and east.⁷¹

The second list of peoples begins with reference to the Gordyaei in the mountains to the north of Mesopotamia:

Next to the Gordyaei are the Azoni, through whose territory the river Zerbis runs into the Tigris; next to the Azoni are the Silici, a mountain tribe, and the Orontes, to the west of whom lies the town of Gaugamela, as also Suae among the rocks. Beyond the Silici are the Sitrae through whose district the river Lycus flows out of Armenia, south-east of Sitrae the town of Azochis, then in the plains the towns of Dios Pege (Zeus’ Spring), Polyte-
lia, Stratonice, and Anthemus.”⁷²

Arabes introrsus Eldamari, supra quos ad Pallacontam flumen Bura oppidum, Salmani et Masei Arabes.”

66 Pliny *NH* 5.85. Chapter 4.

67 Thanks to Kevin Van Bladel for the suggestion.

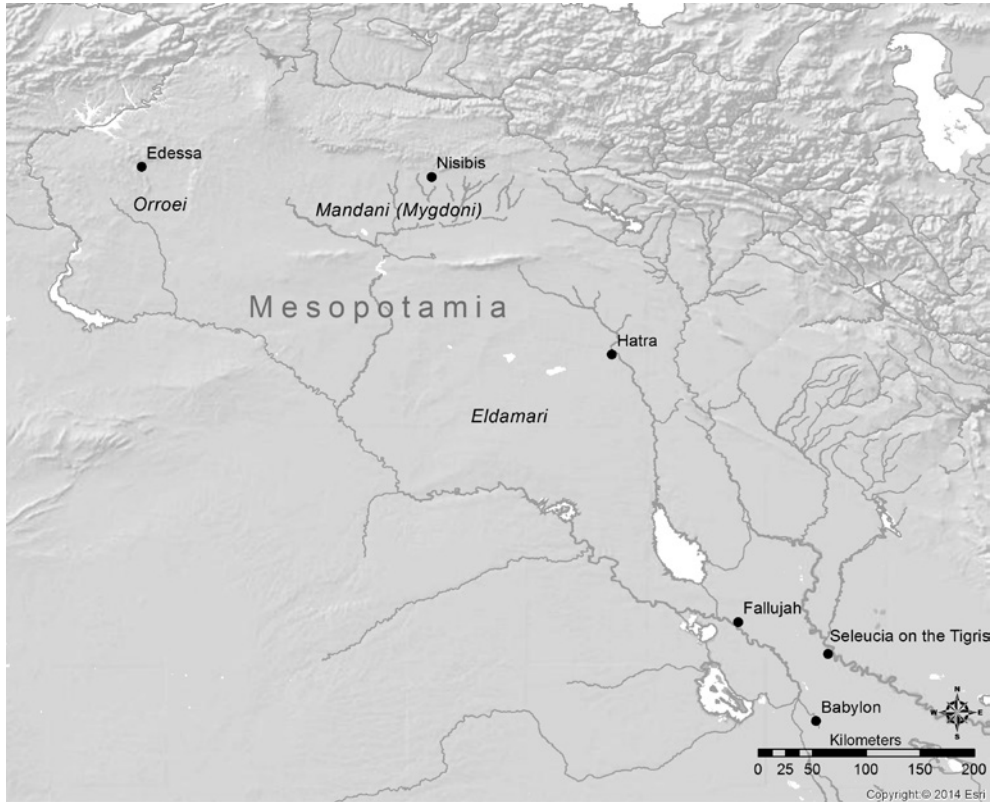
68 Strabo 16.1.23. Mygdonian Antiochia does appear in Pliny’s work by that name, Pliny *NH* 6.41–42.

69 Bivar (2000) 69–70; Retsö (2003) 406; Meissner (1896). Alexander sailed south on the Pallaconta during his preparations for his proposed Arabian campaign, Arr. *Anab.* 7.21. For Pirisabora/Anbar: Oelsner, Joachim, ‘Ambarra’ *BNP*; Matthews (1989) 132, 149, 174–75; Musil (1927) 353–57.

70 Retsö (2003) 406. Baghdad lies on the Tigris, due east of Fallujah.

71 Retsö (2003) 406 speculates that Masei may be related to Mesene in some way: “The Salmani and Masei are difficult to locate, unless it is assumed that Masei has something to do with Mesene. It could thus refer to the kingdom of Charax and support the assumption of Arab presence in that area.”

72 Pliny *NH* 6.118–19: “Gordyaei vero iuncti Azoni, per quos Zerbis fluvius in Tigrim eadit, Azonis Silices montani et Orontes, quorum ad occidentem oppidum Gaugamela, item Suae in rupibus. Supra Silicas Sitrae, per quos Lycus ex Armenia fertur, ab Sitris ad



MAP 5.3 Pliny's Mesopotamian peoples

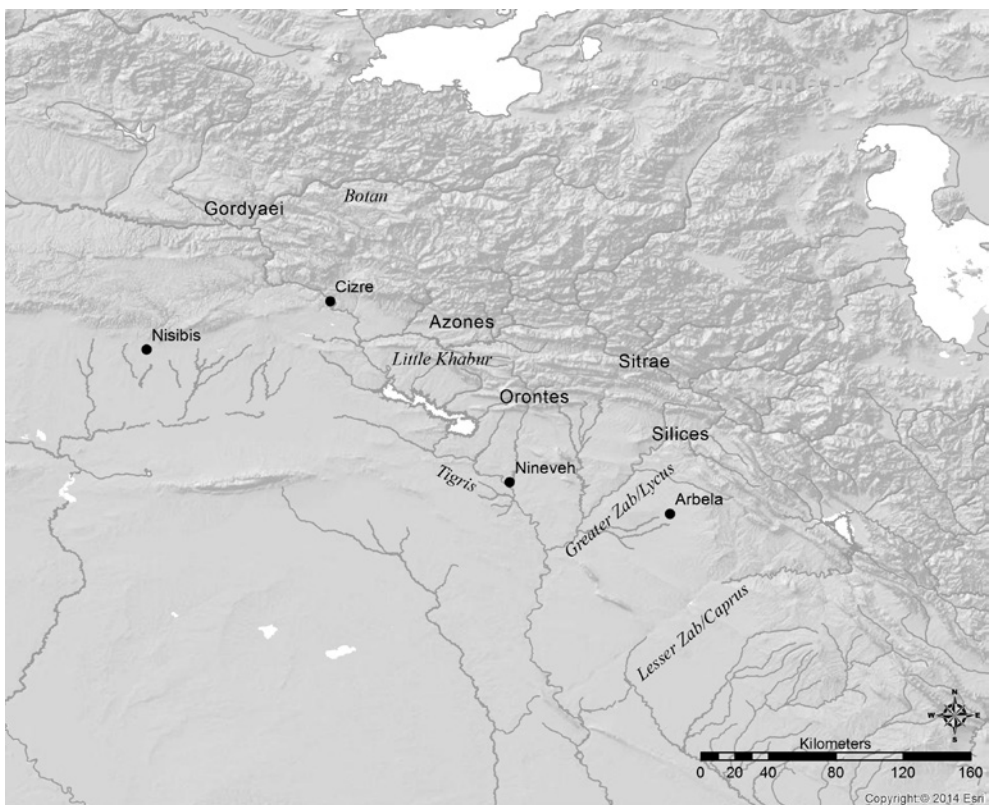
The key locations that anchor this section to the left bank of the Tigris are Gaugamela (near Arbela), the Lycus (one of the rivers bounding the geographical region of Adiabene), and the Gordyaei.⁷³ As discussed above, the “Gordyaei” are Strabo’s Gordyaeans and Xenophon’s Carduchians. They inhabit the mountains between Armenia and Mesopotamia, probably around the Upper Tigris Basin on both sides of the river until it descends into the plains of Mesopotamia near the modern city of Cizre.⁷⁴ The Azones inhabit the lands on either side of the “Zerbis” River. Olshausen assumes that “Zerbis” refers to either the Greater or Lesser Zab, the former also known in antiquity as the

hibnerum exortum Azochis oppidum, mox in campestribus oppida Dios Pege, Polytelia, Stratonicea, Anthemus.”

73 The existence of a kingdom of Adiabene that expanded beyond this core area means that Adiabene sometimes has a wider, political, meaning in the sources.

74 Pliny *NH* 6.129. Pliny elsewhere calls them Carduchi and Cordueni (*NH* 6.44); the variation may mean simply that Pliny has derived his information from different sources.

Lycus (modern al-Zāb al-Kabīr) and the latter as the Caprus (modern al-Zāb al-Ṣaġīr).⁷⁵ However, the peoples of this passage are well linked topologically, progressing from the Gordyaeans to the northwest, and moving south along the east bank of the Tigris through Adiabene. Pliny lists the Zerbis before the Lycus/Greater Zab, so unless Pliny's account is garbled, the Zerbis should lie to the north of the Lycus, whereas the Caprus/Lesser Zab lies south of the Lycus. For this reason, Marciak suggests that Pliny's Zerbis be identified with the Botan;⁷⁶ but that river (also known by Classical authors as the Kentrites), which separated the Gordyaeans from the Armenians, should lie to the north of the Gordyaeans, not to the south. The Zerbis could be the Little Khabur, a tributary of the Tigris between the Botan and the Greater Zab that enters the Tigris about 25 kilometres south of Cizre. Next to the Azones are the Silices and



MAP 5.4 Mountain peoples

⁷⁵ Olshausen, Eckart, 'Zerbis' *BNP*.

⁷⁶ Marciak (2011) 186–87.

the Orontes: the Silices explicitly dwell in the mountains, while the Orontes are east of Gaugamela. The grammar is unclear regarding Suae, which could either be another tribe or a town or place used as a topological reference point. The Sitrae lie around the river Lycus (the Greater Zab), further south or east from the Silices (*supra*) and northeast of a town called Azochis.

These two lists of population groups comprise half of the narrative space that Pliny devotes to Mesopotamia. These peoples are largely disassociated from the cities which also occupy the space. Most of these cities come in two brief and bare lists of names; Pliny makes no attempt to locate them topologically to the geophysical space or in relation to the people of Mesopotamia. Moreover, those cities are overwhelmingly Macedonian in name, making a sharp separation between the listed Macedonia cities and the listed peoples. By contrast, Pliny's presentation of Roman Syria integrates the people and the cities. Both kinds of population unit are mixed together in an alphabetical and atopolological structure. As I argued in Chapter 4, Pliny is largely unconcerned with topology; however, he is concerned with coherent organisation.

4 Hellenistic Migration

The sedentary people of the borderland lie at the other end of Strabo's continuum. By the nature of their geographically fixed and often monumentalised lifestyles, sedentary people leave a traceable mark on the real landscape. Accordingly, these populations have already made their own mark in the landscape of my narrative.⁷⁷ However, it is important to emphasise that these sites are population centres and that the words used to describe them also adhere in certain ways to the people who live there. Thus, when geographical texts give a city a Greek or Macedonian name, they imply a claim about its people. The relationship between that claim and the reality of that population's identity can only ever be partially true. Cities seldom have homogeneous populations, regardless of the characteristic under examination.⁷⁸ This is especially true in an area where mobility is so prevalent, be it local mobility in the form of pastoral or nomadic groups or long-distance mobility as the next chapter will illustrate.

The extent to which Hellenistic migration changed the ethnographic landscape of the Mesopotamian Borderland is not visible in the Roman imperial

⁷⁷ Examples abound in Chapter 4. On Hellenistic migration in Strabo, see Cameron (2018).

⁷⁸ Andrade (2013) examines the ways in which Syrians negotiated the complex landscape of imperial cultural signifiers in performance of their various identities.

geographic texts. Hellenistic imperialism imposed Hellenic names and colonial foundations on the land and its people, but what that meant in terms of population movement and intermarriage is a continuing question.⁷⁹ Even the question of “foundations” is fraught. Were these actual migrations or mere name changes in ideological service to an imperial dedicatee? In the case of Tigranocerta, we have evidence of settlement depopulation, relocation, and then return.⁸⁰

We have good reason to doubt the extent to which Strabo and Pliny saw the people living in these colonial cities as Hellenic. In their texts, the borderland places with colonial names are also attached to ethnonyms derived from local names: consider the “Hellenic” cities of Osrhoene or the relationship between Nisibis, Mygdonia and Antioch. These narrative dual identities have the effect of “othering” the populations they signify. They may be “Greek” in one sense, but they are “Assyrian” in another. As always, the differing nature of the sources make comparison difficult. Strabo and Pliny give enough descriptive narrative to observe this othering, Ptolemy does not. By the fourth century, Ammianus and the *Expositio* are clear that these people are all Roman. By that time, the alternative is Persian. Identity is aggregated to an imperial level.

The people of the Mesopotamian Borderland are described using various local ethnonyms. Sometimes these ethnonyms were imposed by the Macedonians. In those cases, the Macedonians appear at arm’s length, as an imperial force bestowing names and the administrative and agricultural technology of civilisation, but the people of the Mesopotamian Borderland do not achieve the status of their colonial benefactors by becoming Macedonians.

5 Viewing Space

Part 1 has taken a somewhat chronological approach in order to illuminate changes and similarities in the description, naming and definition of these spaces over the first four centuries CE. One notable change is in the quality and quantity of knowledge presented by the Roman imperial geographic writers. Because the majority of the Hellenistic sources which those writers relied on were written by scholars whose experiential world was the eastern Mediterranean,⁸¹ their geographical narratives become less precise as

79 In particular, see Frézouls (1983); Frézouls (1987); Frézouls (1988).

80 See Chapter 4.

81 Eratosthenes of Cyrene, later based at Alexandria; Poseidonius of Apamea, later a citizen of Rhobes; and Artemidorus of Ephesus. See Chapter 2.

they describe areas further from that sea.⁸² Strabo, writing in the early first century CE, presented the internal divisions of Syria quite clearly and provided a wealth of geographical and ethnographic detail. In his description of Mesopotamia, fewer cities are described and the geographical detail is presented at a broader level (all of the fertile northern area is discussed as a unity, for example). Further from Roman territory, the spatial divisions of Adiabene and Babylonia are less clear still, and only politically or historically important cities and populations are described. By the mid-first century CE, Pliny names a greater number of Syrian features than Strabo, although his project does not require that he describe them in as much detail. Moreover, also like Strabo's, Pliny's account becomes less detailed and less coherent as the narrative proceeds east from Mesopotamia into Assyria and Babylonia, crossing geographical boundaries between those regions which Pliny does not define. The lack of detailed description of the sites and peoples is due to the cataloguing approach of Pliny's project and of some of his sources (including Roman administrative lists). Nevertheless, the sheer number of locations recorded in Pliny's account suggest a lesser degree of selectivity or a greater degree of knowledge than Strabo. One area in which the changing presentation of the borderland can be examined more closely is in the placement of the Skenitai in the works of Pliny and Strabo. Here, the change was due to the development of Roman knowledge of the Mesopotamian Borderland rather than a selective choice. As well as the position assigned to them on the Euphrates, Pliny's Skenitai inhabit a wide area between Babylonia and Syria: they dwell on the right (west) bank of the Euphrates where it meets the Tigris⁸³ and range from the margins of Babylonia to the Syrian desert near Palmyra:

Where [the Euphrates] ceases to be protected by its banks as it approaches the edge of the region of Charax, it is immediately infested by the Attali, an Arab tribe of bandits, beyond whom are the Skenitai. In fact, the nomads of Arabia occupy the course of the Euphrates right up to the desert of Syria where, as I said, it turns to the south, abandoning the Palmyrene desert.⁸⁴

82 This is also evident in ancient views of India, which focus on the west and show a steady development of knowledge of areas further east, G.R. Parker (2002) 79.

83 Pliny *NH* 6.145: "E Parthico autem regno navigantibus vicus Teredon infra confluentem Euphratis et Tigris laeva fluminis Chaldaei optinent, dextra Nomades Scenitae." (But those sailing from the Parthian realm arrive at the village of Teredon below the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. The Chaldaeans dwell on the left bank, the nomad Skenitai on the right.).

84 Pliny *NH* 6.125: "ubi [Euphrates] desiit alveo munire, ad confinium Characis accedente tractu, statim infestant Attali latrones, Arabum gens, ultra quos Scenitae, ambitu vero

This is much the same region as Strabo's Skenitai inhabit. However, the difference between the two accounts lies in an increasing degree of specificity at the margins of this area. In Strabo, the Skenitai occupy the entire region south of the dryland farming zone in the north of Mesopotamia, thus on both sides of the Euphrates.⁸⁵ In Pliny, they are described only south of the Euphrates; the Arab groups to the north of the Euphrates are differentiated by specific names (Eldamari, Salmani and Masei).⁸⁶ Pliny simply mentions the names of these groups, so it is not clear whether he considers them primarily nomadic or sedentary; however, he makes no mention of the Skenitai north of the Euphrates. Regardless of the terms used by Strabo or Pliny to describe the means of subsistence of the Arab tribes in the arid steppes between the Euphrates and the fertile, rain-fed northern zone, it is unlikely that their ways of life changed significantly in the intervening period. Rather, the change seen between the works of Strabo and Pliny indicates an increasing knowledge of the region. The same can be seen in the case of the Attali in the passage above. In Strabo, this area was inhabited simply by Skenitai;⁸⁷ now Pliny can identify the specific name of a tribe of Arab bandits (*latrones*) between the river and the Skenitai.

The same pattern is evident in Ptolemy's early-second century work. He names and locates a greater number of sites throughout the region than his predecessors. As his narrative proceeds towards the east, his knowledge of the precise and relative locations of the regional subdivisions seems to decrease, as does his knowledge of the relationships between those subdivisions and the coordinate-located features within and around them. Whether judged on quality of organisation or sheer number or density of sites, Ptolemy displays progressively less knowledge about Assyria and Babylonia than he does about Mesopotamia, and less about Mesopotamia than he does about Syria.⁸⁸ Ptolemy probably obtained most of his coordinates from the work of other natural scientists, especially those coordinates for sites long used as reference points.⁸⁹ These inherited coordinates were probably based on scientific observations of varying degrees of accuracy. Ptolemy would have calculated or corrected some based on his own observations. However, regardless of who introduced any given coordinate location into the geographic tradition represented by Ptolemy, most of the coordinates listed were extrapolated from non-scientific sources, especially travellers' accounts or itineraries like that

Euphratis nomades Arabiae usque ad deserta Syriae, unde in meridiem flecti eum diximus, solitudines Palmyrenas relinquentem." See also Pliny *NH* 5.65; 6.143.

85 Strabo 16.1.26–27.

86 Pliny *NH* 6.118.

87 Strabo 16.1.8.

88 See Chapter 4.

89 See Chapter 2.

of Isidore of Charax. Authors like Strabo who emphasise sites of political or historical importance at the expense of completeness may have chosen to omit many of these sites because of the spatial constraints of their work, whereas authors like Pliny would have every reason to include list upon list of sites of lesser importance to build a quantitative image of Roman power. Just as the locations of the places Pliny mentions are less important to his project than their presence in his catalogue, so the accuracy of the locations Ptolemy lists is less important as a barometer of geographic knowledge than the fact that he knows that they exist and is confident enough in that knowledge to provide coordinate information. The increased number of sites listed attests to the degree of geographical knowledge that was available in the late first century CE Roman Empire.

A further change in the quantity and quality of knowledge presented occurs in Ammianus' work. Much of this change is related to the scope of his project and the brevity of his geographical narratives. Ammianus' geographical writing serves the historical focus of the work, and the information he provides is selected to support that narrative. Moreover, as a native of Syria who served in Roman campaigns in Mesopotamia, we should expect Ammianus to be better acquainted with the geography of the region than any of our other geographic sources, regardless of when his work was written. Indeed, Ammianus does show a good knowledge of spatial relationships and topology and it is clear from his descriptions of the various campaigns in the region which he himself participated in that his knowledge of Mesopotamia was greater than his geographical predecessors. For this very reason, however, it is dangerous to generalise the level of geographic knowledge in the Roman intellectual sphere from his work.

The differing priorities of each of these authors is evident in their approach to the description and division of space. The final shape of their texts reflects their practices of selection, aggregation and representation, especially as pertains to the human imprint on the landscape and on the narrative. The size of the pool of geographic material available for inclusion was an important factor. Despite the differences in purpose and scope of the geographic projects discussed here, a chronological consideration of the works shows a gradual growth of geographic knowledge of the Mesopotamian Borderland over at least the first two centuries of the Roman Empire. This suggests a certain openness of the border to the movement of people and the information which accompanied them.⁹⁰

90 This openness has been demonstrated for the late antique period: Lee (1993); Graham (2006).

6 Individual Mobility

This chapter has proceeded through a discussion of the specifically identified population groups of the Mesopotamian Borderland from those characterised as most mobile to those characterised as least mobile, to the extent that our sources allow such a categorisation. The scale of examination of the Roman imperial geographic texts requires that groups be of a certain size to be represented. Our sources are not concerned with the mobile individual.⁹¹ The geographical writers made exceptions where a large number of mobile individuals were reflected in a significant geographical feature. For example, Strabo mentions river travel and crossing points and expresses distances in travel times.⁹² These features must suggest large-scale, repeated movement of individuals, even if that movement is not shown. Nevertheless, the overlapping networks of control evident in the Mesopotamian Borderland had implications for the movement of individuals at a local, regional or inter-imperial scale.

Hints of individual mobility can be seen in other sources of evidence. Perhaps most famous is the story of Apollonius at the customs station in Zeugma. There a tax collector requires Apollonius to declare what goods he is taking over the bridge, then when he misunderstands Apollonius' list of virtues (all feminine nouns), he presumes them to be slaves and requires a written itemisation.⁹³ Epigraphy shows the presence of customs contractors.⁹⁴ As well as allowing authorities to tax movement, systems of control also allow them to protect those moving or prevent movement. The extensive network of small fortified sites across the Syrian desert and the Jariza are usually discussed in terms of protection of routes of movement and control of pastoralist groups.⁹⁵ In his description of the defection of Antonius to the Persians, Ammianus describes Antonius' plan to avoid station guards (*stationarios milites*) who would

91 The exception is Ammianus, whose historical account of Mesopotamia often takes a personal perspective. When Ammianus is writing in a geographic mode, the same issue of scale applies.

92 A few examples: River travel: 16.1.9, 10. Crossings: 16.1.21. Distances expressed as journeys: 16.1.17.

93 Philostr. *VA* 1.20.

94 From Palmyra: *Inv.* x, 29 = *PAT* 1373; Gawlikowski (1994) 33, no. 25. Erected in 161 CE, it honours M. Aemilius Marcius Asclepiades a counselor of Antioch and customs contractor. The Palmyrene Tax Law is discussed in Chapter 6. For the Palmyrene "tax zone", see Smith (2013) 4–5.

95 Many examples can be seen in Kennedy (1990). For the Macedonian fortresses on the Euphrates: Chaumont (1984) 105. Forts along Roman roads in Syria: Isaac (1990) 163–71. Comparison between Egyptian fortified wells (*hydreumata*) and Syrian desert forts: Young (2001) 69–74.

presumably have stopped his defection.⁹⁶ The sources as whole allow us to glimpse fragments of control of movement in the Mesopotamian Borderland, but the image is too fragmentary to grasp from the geographical sources alone. Such individual mobility and action was not relevant to the scope and interests of the geographical writers. The major exception is the commercial sphere.

96 Amm. Marc.18.5.3: "Atque ut lateret stationarios milites, fundum in Hiaspide, qui locus Tigridis fluentis adluitur, pretio non magno mercatur." (And so in order to escape the notice of the station guards, he bought at no great price a farm in Hiaspis, a place washed by the waters of the Tigris.) Jonge (1980) 125–26.

PART 2

Movement and Power



Carrying

The definitive characteristic of a borderland are the boundaries which overlap and interact within it. Boundaries in turn are defined by how, where and why they attempt to prevent, restrict, and control movement. Movement and mobility thus lie at the heart of any examination of a borderland space, and the Mesopotamian Borderland is no different. This chapter considers the presentation of commercial movement in imperial Roman geographic writing by examining the types of commercial activity and movement represented in the texts and the interaction of that activity and movement with local and regional economies, communities and political structures.

In considering the geographic presentation of movement, it is important to remember that people seldom universally conform to restrictions on movement. Where the possibility of movement exists, someone will try to profit by it. Boundaries reflect and create differential conditions on either side, and such conditions provide opportunities for those willing to transgress those boundaries and create their own paths through space.¹ The geographical, political, cultural, demographic and economic boundaries of the Mesopotamian Borderland afforded ample opportunity for profitable boundary crossing, most obviously involving the transport of goods, people and ideas between the Roman and Iranian spheres. By examining the kind of movement taking place and its presentation by the geographical writers, we can build a better picture of the interaction between those spaces and the spatial representation of the region. The geographical sources reveal movement in many ways: explicitly or implicitly; by inference from omissions or from narrative structure; by the presence of mobile people, mobile activities, or structures and places designed to serve mobile people and activities.

While cognisant of the tendency for people to create their own paths through space, we may nevertheless examine certain frequently attested routes which attracted both the movement of considerable numbers of people and the attention of the imperial geographic writers. The extant geographical narratives of Mesopotamia describe three main routes of inter-imperial border crossing,

1 Barth (2000); Sahlins (1989). The theoretical underpinnings of much work on the interactions between space, society and individual action lies in the work of Henri Lefebvre, in particular his *La Production de l'espace* (1974), translated into English in 1991: Lefebvre (1991); Soja (1996).

each of which is best conceptualised as a set of routes which pass through the same general areas. From north to south they are: 1) the northern route, which reached the Euphrates from the west through Roman Commagene or Syria and proceeded east across the rain-fed northern zone of Mesopotamia at the foot of the Taurus Mountains towards Adiabene, the Tigris River and Armenia; 2) the Euphrates route, which crossed the Euphrates in the same places, then more-or-less followed the river south-east towards the important cities of Parthian or Sasanian Babylonia; and 3) the desert route, created and operated by Palmyrene caravans traversing the Syrian desert between Palmyra and various Palmyrene trading outposts in cities along the middle and lower Euphrates. The geographical writers also provide evidence of inter-provincial routes running north-south within the Roman Empire as well as local routes.

In this chapter, I will examine the presentation of each of these routes in the Roman imperial geographic sources. I begin with the Euphrates route, described in different ways by Strabo, Isidore and Ammianus. I then address the northern routes, alluded to by Pliny and Ammianus, but finding their fullest exploration in the *Expositio Totius Mundi*. Our main geographical source for the desert routes is Pliny, but a picture of the local movement in the Palmyrene hinterland emerges when Ptolemy's *Geography* is examined in the light of the Palmyrene Tax Law. The final set of routes I consider are those which run north-south through the borderland. These are largely absent from the geographic narratives of the Mesopotamian Borderland. The last section of the chapter is devoted to what little local movement is visible in these geographical narratives, much evidence of which appears in the *Antonine Itineraries* and the *Peutinger Table*. Overall, I argue that commercial and economic factors were a major influence on the way geographical sources constructed the borderland in nearly every case, and that the Roman imperial geographic writers emphasise inter-imperial connections over intra-imperial and local links. Before proceeding with the analyses of these specific sets of routes, it is necessary to place the Mesopotamian Borderland in the context of long distance trade between the Roman Empire and the regions to the east, since the role of northern Mesopotamia is overshadowed by a greater degree of ancient evidence and contemporary scholarly interest in trade routes through the Red Sea to India.

1 Long-distance Trade

What was the role of the Mesopotamian Borderland in eastern trade? Roman trade with the states and people to the east seems to have been conducted along two main vectors: by sea to India and overland through the Parthian Empire

via “the silk road” to Central Asia and China.² As with the routes through the borderland, these two vectors reflect several paths which could be taken by enterprising merchants, often combining land and sea travel. The sea route to India was itself structured along two axes of movement: through Egypt and the Red Sea and through Palmyra and the Persian Gulf.³ Several recent works have analysed trade interactions between Rome and the East; it is not necessary to re-examine their arguments in detail here. Rather, I will briefly summarise the main points salient to an examination of the commercial networks visible in descriptions of the Mesopotamian Borderland, especially regarding the Red Sea route which offered an alternative to the Palmyrene route to the Persian Gulf passing through the Mesopotamian Borderland.⁴

The goods which were the object of these long distance routes were high-value and portable items such as silk and spices. Parker’s examination of a third century list of goods subject to tax at Alexandria (the sole Roman customs point for long-distance trade through Egypt) shows that items with medicinal, culinary, cosmetic, aromatic and decorative uses were transported through the Red Sea.⁵ Although it has been, and remains, common to describe these as “luxury goods”, that term is anachronistic and fails to account for the use of these items in religious and medical practices.⁶ The common factor is not a subjective category like “luxury”, but high degree of value for their weight and bulk. These goods must have offered merchants considerable opportunity for profit to offset the high risk and cost of long-distance travel by land or sea.

While the volume of trade is difficult to estimate, some patterns can be seen.⁷ Commercial links through the Red Sea to India preceded Roman control of Egypt but accelerated under the Julio-Claudians.⁸ Ptolemaic kings established infrastructure linking the Red Sea to the Nile valley and appear to have

2 Zuchowska (2016) describes how Chinese silk made its way to the Roman Empire through an extended network of relatively short-range interactions of trade, exchange and gifts. For more on the Silk Road, see Hansen (2012).

3 Seland (2011) describes the two routes and the factors that merchants would balance in choosing between them.

4 Further detail on trade between Rome, India, Arabia and Iran can be found in Young (2011); Tomber (2008); Morley (2007); Parker (2008a); Casson (1989); Parker (2001); Salles (1998). A brief bibliography of older works can be found in Smith (2013) 189 n. 5.

5 G.R. Parker (2002) 41–55. On goods mentioned by the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* specifically, see Casson (1989) 21–27.

6 Young (2011) 14–18; Tomber (2008) 15–16 (with bibliography).

7 Young (2011) 24–26; G.R. Parker (2002) esp. 74–74 and 77–78.

8 On commercial links between Roman Egypt and India, see Young (2011) 27–89; Tomber (2008) 57–87; Whittaker (1998); Salles (1998); Casson (1989).

played a quite active role in developing the route.⁹ Initially, Greek merchants only operated in the Red Sea itself, trading with Indian merchants at Aden. Around the end of the second century BCE, Greek sailors figured out how to sail with the monsoon and began to ply the entire route between Egypt and India.¹⁰ Archaeological research has revealed substantial quantities of Roman material at Indian sites, especially from the second century CE, as well as imperial investment in the development and maintenance of Red Sea and Nile ports and the road and canal system between them.¹¹ The trade with India was of such a volume that a substantial and permanent Roman community seems to have been established in the southern Indian city of Muziris.¹² Roman coins were exchanged as far as Sri Lanka and the geographers included descriptions of that island, no doubt informed by travellers' reports.¹³ Numismatic evidence suggests the trade was at its peak under the Julio-Claudians and began to decline in the second century, with brief revivals during the reigns of Antoninus Pius and Septimius Severus.¹⁴ The disrupted conditions of the third century Roman Empire seem to have reduced Roman participation in the Red Sea routes and allowed the rising power of the Axumites to the south of the Red Sea to begin to dominate the route to India.¹⁵ Under Diocletian, the fortunes of Roman merchants began to revive; the route remained active at least into the fifth century CE.¹⁶

Before and during the first century CE, this pattern of development and activity is borne out by the literary sources. Artemidorus' description of the Hellenistic route along the Red Sea coast is relayed to us by Strabo.¹⁷ Despite the likelihood that such coastal *periploi* derived from mercantile movement or

9 Young (2011) 27; Parker (2001) 73; Tomber (2008) 60–64; G.R. Parker (2002) 69; Casson (1989) 36.

10 Casson (1989) 12; Young (2011) 28–32. Trade with Arabia continued as a separate undertaking, governed by the timing of the incense harvest rather than the monsoon season, Young (2011) 34–36.

11 Indian sites: Casson (1989) 12; Tomber (2008). Egyptian infrastructure: Casson (1989) 13–14; Young (2011) 38–45 (ports), 45–54 (Julio – Claudian and Flavian roads), 74–79 (second century roads and canals).

12 Young (2011) 30–31; Documentary evidence for “Yavana” (Greeks) at Muziris: G.R. Parker (2002) 63–64.

13 Strabo (15.1.14–15) quotes Eratosthenes, Onesicritus and mentions that other authors described the island. Pliny 6.89 on trade with Taprobane. Taprobane is the last region to be described in Ptolemy's work (7.4); it lies narratively at the edge of the world. Young (2011) 32–33; G.R. Parker (2002) 78; Walburg (2008) 319–42.

14 Young (2011) 74–79; Tomber (2008) 30–37.

15 G.R. Parker (2002) 71–72. Mlasowsky and Pahlitzsch, “Axum, Axomis.” *BNP*.

16 Young (2011) 86–88.

17 Strabo 16.4.5ff.

were reliant on sailing expertise based on that activity, Strabo is dismissive of the reliability of private citizens engaged in commercial practices.¹⁸ However, he notes that the growth of such trade was a beneficial outcome of the Roman annexation of Egypt, boasting on two occasions that since the institution of Roman rule, large fleets had begun to work the routes between Egypt and India, with a specific emphasis on the collection of taxes on both incoming and outgoing cargoes.¹⁹ In these boasts, Strabo reveals the considerable expansion of the route under Augustus. Towards the end of the Julio-Claudian period, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* provides our best source for the operation of this route. This anonymous Greek text, written around 40–70 CE, probably by a merchant based in Egypt, attests to a thriving commercial link between Roman Egypt and the cities and states of southern Arabia and western India at that time.²⁰ Soon after, Pliny describes the route between Alexandria and India, specifying the dates of the important monsoon wind pattern in the northwest Indian Ocean.²¹ Pliny's report that reliable information on the geography of south Asia had only recently become available points to the growth of this trade route and to the production of texts like the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* in the Flavian period.²² Although seasonal prevailing winds hinder or prevent certain sailing routes, this maritime route around Arabia was the main channel for Indian goods to arrive in the Roman Empire. The narrative of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* skips across the mouth of the Persian Gulf, but notes that exports from the Gulf could be exchanged in the cities on either side of its mouth.²³ There is little evidence of Roman commercial activity in the Gulf itself; it seems that it played a minor role in Indo-Roman trade.²⁴ The route

18 Strabo 15.1.4: "Καὶ οἱ νῦν δὲ ἐξ Αἰγύπτου πλείοντες ἐμπορικοὶ τῷ Νεῖλῳ καὶ τῷ Ἀραβίῳ κόλπῳ μέχρι τῆς Ἰνδικῆς σπάνιοι μὲν καὶ περιπεπλεύκασιν μέχρι τοῦ Γάγγου, καὶ οὗτοι δ' ἰδιῶται καὶ οὐδὲν πρὸς ἱστορίαν τῶν τόπων χρήσιμοι." (It is rare for the merchants who today sail from Egypt by means of the Nile and the Arabian Gulf [the Red Sea] as far as India to sail as far as the Ganges, and they are laymen and are of no use for the history of the places.) Translation Roller (2014). Whittaker notes the double meanings of ἰδιῶται (ignorant/private) and ἱστορίαν (inquiry/history), Whittaker (1998) 19–20.

19 Strabo 2.5.12; 17.1.13; Biffi (1999) 287–89. See also his remarks on the important Egyptian ports of Berenike and Myus Hormus: Strabo 17.1.45; Biffi (1999) 346–47.

20 Casson (1989) 6–10; G.R. Parker (2002) 62–63. Casson notes several first person references which suggest the author considered Egypt his home.

21 Pliny *NH* 6.102–104. Casson (1989) 13–15. On Pliny and trade generally, see French (1994) 210–12.

22 Pliny 6.101; Parker (2001) 71.

23 Casson (1989) 19.

24 Tomber (2008) 109–16; Rutten (2007) 17–19. There is evidence of trade between Babylonia and India from the Bronze Age to the Seleucid period (Lamberg-Karlovsky (1996) 87–88; G.R. Parker (2002) 70). The Achaemenids and Seleucids maintained a navy in the

around Arabia described by the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* was the major connection between the Roman Mediterranean and India; most such trade bypassed the overland routes through Babylonia and Mesopotamia.

It used to be common to speak of the Parthians controlling and monopolising overland trade, especially the “silk road” to central Asia and China.²⁵ However, the bulk of literary and archaeological evidence suggests India may have been the Roman Empire’s main source of silk.²⁶ Certainly, there is no evidence of intentional manipulation or obstruction of overland trade by the Parthians beyond the usually collection of taxes.²⁷ In fact, as we will see later in this chapter, their permissiveness regarding the operation of Palmyrene merchants in their territory suggests, if anything, the opposite. We have more evidence for Roman trade through the Indian Ocean than overland, although whether this should be attributed to a Roman preference for a convenient and efficient sea-route or to the history of archaeological exploration in Southwestern and Central Asia is unclear. Nevertheless, the importance of that route did not render other paths redundant, especially those which allowed access to inland areas.

2 Strabo and the Euphrates Route

Strabo provides one of our best sources for movement in the Mesopotamian Borderland, especially for mercantile activity along the Euphrates. Strabo

Arabian Gulf to support their trading ports. The latter empire may have pursued a deliberate policy with commercial objectives: Salles (1987) esp. 88–99. This trade continued in the Parthian and Sasanian periods, although evidence of Roman trade far outweighs the Mesopotamian material (Tomber (2008) 79–80, 99–100, 146–147). Most of this evidence comes from northwest India and consists of storage vessels, raising the questions of whether Roman goods were traded and repackaged in Babylonia, of the visibility of goods not requiring permanent vessels, and of the nature of the trade relationships between northwest India and the eastern regions of the Parthian and Sasanian Empires.

25 Schoff (1989) 18–19; Warmington (1974) 20; Miller (1969) 139, 235; Thorley (1971) 75. For a thorough recent overview of the history and archaeology of the Silk Road, see Hansen (2012). For a discussion of the nature and operation of commercial networks between the Roman Empire and central Asia, see Andrade (2015).

26 Young (2011) 28; Raschke (1978) 630–31.

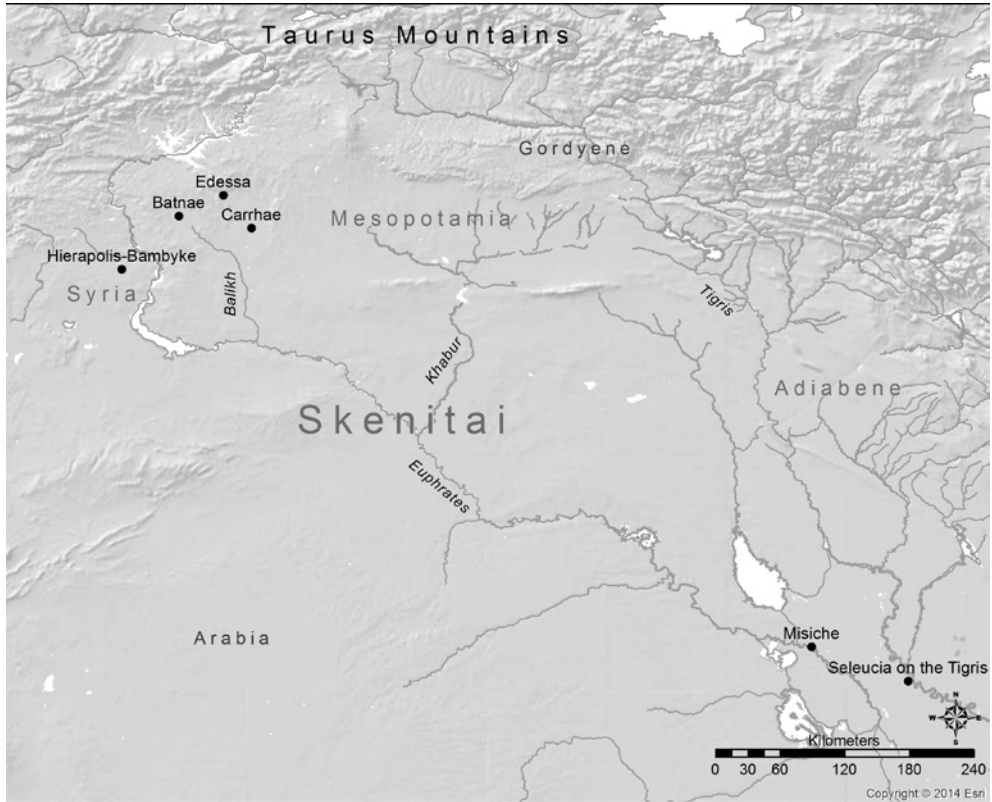
27 Young (2011) 195–98. Cf. Andrade (2015) 51–60 who argues that the Parthians “implemented endeavors to disrupt the movement of Roman imperial inhabitants into the Iranian plateau and central Asia, and profits from the silk trade were a principal reason. (p. 51)” However, the evidence he presents suggests that Parthian intervention was restricted to tax collection and that Seleucia on the Tigris served as a meeting point between Roman and Iranian merchants as one node in a network of commercial-social connections that together comprised these long-distance routes, Andrade (2015) 73; Zuchowska (2016).

provides a concrete and personal description of this route entwined with a mercantile perspective on matters such as taxation and the logistics of travel through arid areas. However, as I will show, his description treats the route as passing through an ambiguous space between empires. This differs from the accounts of Isidore and Ammianus who describe the route as a topologically located pathway connecting settlements within the space.

In his description of Mesopotamia, Strabo describes a route beginning in Syria which, except for a brief diversion through the desert, proceeds down the Euphrates to a place called Skenai on the borders of Babylonia (Map 6.1: Strabo's Euphrates Route):

The route for those travelling as merchants from Syria to Seleucia and Babylon runs through the country of the Skenitai, now called Malians by some writers, and through their desert. Such travellers cross the Euphrates near Anthemusia, a place in Mesopotamia; and above the river, at a distance of four *schoinoi*, lies Bambycê, which is also called Edessa and Hierapolis, where the Syrian goddess Atargatis is worshipped; for after they cross the river, the road runs through the desert to Skenai, a noteworthy city situated on a canal towards the borders of Babylonia. The journey (ὁδός) from the crossing [of the Euphrates] to Skenai takes twenty-five days. On it there are camel-drivers who maintain stopping places which are sometimes well-supplied with water from cisterns, but at other times using imported water. The Skenitai are peaceful and moderate towards these travellers in exacting tolls, so those travellers risk travel through the desert in order to avoid the lands near the river (τὴν παραποταμίαν), leaving the river on the right for a journey of almost three days. For the chiefs of those living on both sides of the river, holding land which is not rich, but is less lacking than that of some others, is each sovereign in his particular lands and charges tolls, and these are not moderate. For this reason it is difficult among so many and such stubborn people for a common measure (of taxation) to be set which benefits the merchant. Skenai is eighteen *schoinoi* distant from Seleucia.²⁸

28 Strabo 16.1.27: "διὰ δὲ τῶν Σκηνητῶν, ὑπὸ τῶν Μαλίων νυνὶ λεγομένων, καὶ τῆς ἐκείνων ἐρημίας ἡ ὁδὸς τοῖς ἐκ τῆς Συρίας εἰς Σελεύκειαν καὶ Βαβυλῶνα ἐμπορευομένοις ἐστίν. ἡ μὲν οὖν διάβασις τοῦ Εὐφράτου κατὰ τὴν Ἀνθεμουσίαν ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς, τόπον τῆς Μεσοποταμίας· ὑπέρκειται δὲ τοῦ ποταμοῦ σχοίνους τέτταρας διέχουσα ἡ Βαμβύκη, ἣν καὶ Ἐδεσσαν καὶ Ἱερὰν πόλιν καλοῦσιν, ἐν ᾗ τιμῶσι τὴν Συρίαν θεὸν τὴν Ἀταργάτιν. διαβάντων δὲ ἡ ὁδὸς ἐστὶ διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου ἐπὶ τοὺς τῆς Βαβυλωνίας ὅρους μέχρι Σκηνῶν, ἀξιολόγου πόλεως ἐπὶ τινος διώρυγος ἰδρυμένης. ἔστι δ' ἀπὸ τῆς διαβάσεως μέχρι Σκηνῶν ἡμερῶν πέντε καὶ εἴκοσιν ὁδός. καμνηταὶ δ' εἰσὶ, καταγωγὰς ἔχοντες τότε μὲν ὑδρείων εὐπόρους τῶν λακκαίων τὸ πλέον, τότε δ' ἐπακτοῖς χρώμενοι τοῖς ὕδασι.



MAP 6.1 Strabo's Euphrates route

The length and detail of this passage attests to its importance in Strabo's conception of Mesopotamia.²⁹ Strabo's description of the topology of the route itself is vague, but what his description lacks in geographical specificity, it makes up for in the description of the activities facilitated by the route. This route (ὁδός) crosses the Euphrates near Anthemusia (κατὰ τὴν Ἀνθεμουσίαν) and travels through the southern desert regions (διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου) for 25 days,

παρέχουσι δ' αὐτοῖς οἱ Σκηνῖται τὴν τε εἰρήνην καὶ τὴν μετριότητα τῆς τῶν τελῶν πράξεως, ἥς χάριν φεύγοντες τὴν παραποταμίαν διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου παραβάλλονται, καταλιπόντες ἐν δεξιᾷ τὸν ποταμὸν ἡμερῶν σχεδὸν τι τριῶν ὁδόν. οἱ γὰρ παροικούντες ἐκατέρωθεν τὸν ποταμὸν φύλαρχοι, χώραν οὐκ εὐπορον ἔχοντες, ἦττον δὲ ἄπορον νεμόμενοι, δυναστείαν ἕκαστος ἰδίᾳ περιβεβλημένος ἴδιον καὶ τελώνιον ἔχει, καὶ τοῦτ' οὐ μέτριον. χαλεπὸν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς τοσούτοις καὶ τούτοις αὐθάδεσι κοινὸν ἀφορισθῆναι μέτρον τὸ τῷ ἐμπόρῳ λυσιτελές. διέχουσι δὲ τῆς Σελευκείας αἱ Σκηνῖται σχοίνους ὀκτωκαίδεκα." The locations mentioned in this passage are discussed in Chapter 4.

29 This passage comprises the bulk of Strabo's description of southern Mesopotamia.

mostly following the Euphrates, until it reaches Skenai, ἀξιολόγου πόλεως ἐπὶ τινος διώρυγος ἰδρυμένης (“a noteworthy city situated on a canal”) in Babylonia, probably to be identified with Misiche on the Naarmalcha Canal.³⁰ Rather than give a detailed account of the course of the route or the settlements it passed through, Strabo describes a few cities along the way and generally refers to the amenities available to merchants during the journey, mentioning stations, water supplies, and the collection of taxation by both the Skenitai and the settlements along the river itself.

Strabo's ὁδός is more than an abstract and impersonal link between two spaces. The path which the route takes is not defined topologically, but the distance of the journey is specified in units of travel time (days and *skoinoi*).³¹ This embeds personal mobility in the language of the passage. Furthermore, throughout the passage, Strabo implicitly defines the direction of the route as leading from Roman to Parthian space, placing the agency for the movement firmly in Roman hands. The people moving along the route are described as ἐμπορευομένοις, “those travelling as merchants”. In Strabo's presentation, this is a mercantile route used by traders between the Roman and Parthian Empires. Strabo further highlights the role of commercial movement by framing his description of the route with the perspective of travelling and trading merchants. He introduces his description of the route with a sentence placing the movement of merchants through the lands of the Skenitai (διὰ δὲ τῶν Σκηγιτιῶν ... καὶ τῆς ἐκεῖνων ἐρημίας ἢ ὁδὸς τοῖς ... ἐμπορευομένοις ἐστίν).³² Only after couching the passage in such terms does he proceed with what geographical detail he gives. At the end of the passage, after describing the tax-collection policies of the phylarchs along the river, Strabo gives an aside lamenting the difficulties which those policies impose upon the merchant: “For this reason it is difficult among so many and such stubborn people for a common measure (of taxation) to be set which benefits the merchant.”³³ Except for a final, brief geographical

30 The combination of the imprecision of written sources and difficulties of interpreting the archaeological remains of paths which often remain in use today means that the question of routes through this region is a matter of debate. On the various suggestions for crossing points on the Euphrates between northern Syria (including Commagene) and Osroene, from Assyrian times, see: Gawlikowski (1996); Comfort et al. (2000); Comfort and Ergeç (2001). For the identification of Skenai with Misiche, see Chapter 4.

31 There were two methods available for relating distance, travel time or absolute distance using the *stadion*.

32 Strabo 16.1.27: “The route for those travelling as merchants runs through the Skenitai and their desert”.

33 Strabo 16.1.27: “χαλεπὸν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς τοσούτοις καὶ τούτοις αὐθάδεσι κοινὸν ἀφορισθῆναι μέτρον τὸ τῷ ἐμπόρῳ λυσιτελές” Strabo's use of ἀφορίζω (to mark off by boundaries; ὅρος, boundary) is also interesting in this passage.

note on the distance between Skenai and Seleucia, the passage begins with the movement of merchants and ends with this editorial comment from the narrator on the difficulty of gaining commercial advantage in that profession.

Other mobile parties support the movement of merchants in Strabo's narrative. The most important of these groups were the *καμηλῖται*, camel-guides, who maintained stopping places (*καταγωγὰς*) along the route. Strabo's description alludes to a high degree of organisation by these camel-guides in conjunction with local Skenitai tribes. The camel-guides ensured that these stopping points were supplied with water drawn from cisterns (*τῶν λακκαίων*) or imported (*ἐπακτοῖς τοῖς ὕδασι*). He is not specific about the sources or the mechanism by which this supply occurs, but several possibilities exist. The cisterns could either have been natural wells or oases, or they could have been constructed to collect and store rainwater.³⁴ Rain is scarce in the Jazira, and while it can be heavy when it does occur, it evaporates quickly. Evidence of networks of shallow channels and artificial cisterns for the collection of rainwater has been found in areas where such water supplies might be required, such as the Syrian Desert and the Sinai.³⁵ Strabo states that the stopping places were supplied with water, not that the caravans transported water with them. This implies an organisation of water-transportation to supply the cisterns along the route. This imported water was presumably transported to the stopping places in skins tied to the backs of camels.³⁶ This suggests the circulation of information about cistern levels among camel-guides and their water-transporting agents; depending on the relative size of the cisterns and the caravans, the process may have required timely information to ensure the caravans were adequately supplied. The camel-guides probably also guarded travellers from hostile Skenitai tribes; Strabo notes that the desert was risky for merchants (*διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου παραβάλλονται*). The circulation of information among local networks probably assisted this protective role. The *καμηλῖται* which Strabo describes probably made use of various personal, family and economic ties to the nomadic pastoralists through which they passed to facilitate the passage of goods down the Euphrates, as did the Palmyrene caravans to the south.³⁷

Another major interaction between travellers and local groups was taxation. According to Strabo, the Skenitai of the desert were moderate in their tolls

34 Hoyland (2001) 85. Crossing the Sinai Peninsula required similar logistical considerations, Cruz-Urbe (2003) 22–24.

35 Kennedy and Riley (1990) 70–76; Cruz-Urbe (2003) 23–24.

36 See Herodotus 3.6–7 (with Cruz-Urbe (2003) 20–24) for a description of a similar process.

37 The success of Palmyrene caravan leaders at managing their desert routes and the tribes through which they passed elevated Palmyra to one of the wealthiest and most important cities of Syria. See below and chapter 7.

(τὴν μετριότητα τῆς τῶν τελῶν πράξεως) while the phylarchs of the river communities were not (τελώνιον ἔχει, καὶ τοῦτ' οὐ μέτριον). To avoid the taxation of those phylarchs, some travellers leave the river for almost three days and pass through the territory of Skenitai groups.³⁸ Strabo characterises this desert journey as risky (ἥς χάριν φεύγοντες τὴν παραποταμίαν διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου παραβάλλονται), presumably in part because not all of the Skenitai were peaceful. However, while Strabo implies that all merchants took the desert route, he also implies that accepting the taxation of the phylarchs near the river was an option. It seems that the cost of hiring guides (καμηλῖται) and caravan guards for a desert journey was less of a burden than the taxation imposed while following the route down the river.³⁹ If the desert route was cheaper, did every merchant who could secure guides avoid the river? Probably not. While Strabo does not draw out the specific economic implications, merchants had a choice between the higher-risk desert route with lower fixed costs and a lower-risk route along the river with higher fixed costs. If Strabo's characterisation of the high taxes set by the river phylarchs is correct, that desert journey was perceived (at least by Strabo) as quite risky indeed.

The region's nomadic pastoralists are central to Strabo's description of the route. While Strabo does not provide topographical markers for most of the journey, the space through which the movement passes is defined in both ethnic and geographical terms: the route passes through the Skenitai (διὰ δὲ τῶν Σκηνιτῶν) and their desert (καὶ τῆς ἐκείνων ἐρημίας). Their role in maintaining the route which allowed mercantile movement down the Euphrates has been

38 Strabo 16.1.27 “καταλιπόντες ἐν δεξιᾷ τὸν ποταμὸν ἡμερῶν σχεδὸν τι τριῶν ὁδόν”, (leaving the river on the right for a journey of almost three days). It is unclear whether Strabo refers to a three-day journey or a longer journey, running parallel with the Euphrates three days to the north. Strabo characterises the desert diversion as an attempt to avoid taxation by local rulers along the river, but it may simply refer to the initial stages of Isidore's route across the arid steppe between Zeugma and the Balikh River: Tarn (1963) 608 identifies the route taken by Crassus (Plut. *Cras.* 22) as the route described by Strabo (16.1.27); Millar (1993) 440. If the route described by Strabo did run from Zeugma to the Balikh, it may have passed through Edessa, Ross (2001) 16. On the importance of local guides for a desert crossing: Seland (2015a) 106. Much of Seland's work on the practicalities of Palmyrene trade is also relevant to this desert section of Strabo's account.

39 Strabo 16.1.27: “οἱ γὰρ παρικοῦντες ἐκατέρωθεν τὸν ποταμὸν φύλαρχοι, χώραν οὐκ εὐπορον ἔχοντες, ἦττον δὲ ἄπορον νεμόμενοι, δυναστείαν ἕκαστος ἰδίᾳ περιβεβλημένος ἴδιον καὶ τελώνιον ἔχει, καὶ τοῦτ' οὐ μέτριον. χαλεπὸν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς τοσούτοις καὶ τούτοις αὐθάδεσι κοινὸν ἀφορισθῆναι μέτρον τὸ τῷ ἐμπόρῳ λυσιτελέσῃ” (For the chiefs of those living on both sides of the river, holding land which is not rich, but is less lacking than that of some others, is each sovereign in his particular lands and charges tolls, and these are not moderate. For this reason it is difficult among so many and such stubborn people for a common measure (of taxation) to be set which benefits the merchant.).

described, their second role as an obstacle, or at least a friction, to movement has only been alluded to. Although in this section Strabo declares that the Skenitai are peaceful, elsewhere he refers to their practice of banditry, as we saw in Chapter 5. Strabo uses the term “Skenitai” broadly of nomadic pastoralists in the arid regions of Syria and Mesopotamia, ignoring or unaware of different cultural or tribal groups that certainly existed under that blanket term. The existence of these differences can be seen when Strabo gives contradictory information about the Skenitai, especially when he refers to Skenitai within the same geographical area. This is the case for the Skenitai of the Jazira. In his general description of the Jazira, just before his description of the Euphrates route in which Skenitai are peaceful assistants to travelling merchants, he describes them as wide-ranging bandits (ληστροικοί).⁴⁰ When Strabo characterises the desert journey as risky (ἥς χάριν φεύγοντες τὴν παραποταμίαν διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου παραβάλλονται), he is probably thinking of both the environmental dangers of desert travel and the risks of banditry by the Skenitai who occupied the land through which the movement passed. Most likely, travellers employed camel-guides who were able to facilitate payment to certain Skenitai groups and ward off groups who refused, or who were not offered, payment.

The centrality of the mercantile perspective to the route Strabo describes highlights the role of the route in Strabo’s conception of Mesopotamia as a whole. It is of note that Strabo’s description of the route largely omits any specific description of settled urban areas. He locates the Euphrates crossing with respect to Anthemusia and adds the specific comment that he is referring to a city on the east side of the river (τόπον τῆς Μεσοποταμίας). His confused conflation of Bambyce/Hierapolis and Edessa may indicate that both cities were near the route he describes.⁴¹ Strabo either selectively omits the important Hellenistic settlements of Nikephorion, Circesium and Dura Europus, or conceals them under the rubric of “the phylarchs along the river” (οἱ παροικούντες ἐκατέρωθεν τὸν ποταμὸν φύλαρχοι). Thus, the route is narratively detached from the major urban centres on the banks of the Euphrates. Moreover, in Strabo’s

40 Strabo 16.1.26: “τὰ δὲ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν κεκλιμένα τῆς Μεσοποταμίας καὶ ἀπωτέρω τῶν ὄρων ἄνδρα καὶ λυπρὰ ὄντα ἔχουσιν οἱ σκηνῖται Ἄραβες, ληστροικοὶ τινες καὶ ποιμενικοὶ, μεθιστάμενοι ῥαδίως εἰς ἄλλους τόπους, ὅταν ἐπιλείπωσιν αἱ νομαὶ καὶ αἱ λεηλασίαι. τοῖς οὖν παρορείοις ὑπὸ τε τούτων κακοῦσθαι συμβαίνει καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀρμενίων· ὑπέρκεινται δὲ καὶ καταδυναστεύουσι διὰ τὴν ἰσχύον.” (The Skenitai Arabs occupy those parts of Mesopotamia which incline towards the south and are farther from the mountains, and are waterless and barren. [The Skenitai] are bandits and shepherds, who readily move from place to place when pasture and booty fail them. As a result, the people near the mountains are harassed by the Skenitai and also by the Armenians, who dwell above them and oppress them through brute force.).

41 See Chapter 4.

account, this mercantile activity is quite unconnected to the sedentary culture of the fertile northern areas of Mesopotamia. The merchants travelling along the Euphrates only interact with the settled communities along the river which tax passing caravans and with the mobile communities of Skenitai, who facilitate Mesopotamian transshipment by serving as guides and guards and exploit it by preying on merchants. Moreover, in Strabo's description, the *φύλαρχοι* who interact with and benefit from the travelling merchants are only concerned with the tax revenue they can gather from the passing traders, not with any other benefits that might accrue from their presence. Their interaction is solely described in terms relevant to the route as a transshipment route through Mesopotamia. This transshipment route is the major link Strabo draws between Mesopotamia and empires to the east and west. In fact, in Strabo's presentation, the route does not serve to connect northern Mesopotamian cities to each other and to the outside world at all, but instead acts as a conduit between Mediterranean and Iranian space. For Strabo, this transit is the only local economic activity that extends beyond Mesopotamia itself, making Mesopotamia a transitory space of movement between the Roman and Iranian Empires. The route is more of a highway through Mesopotamia than part of an integrated regional network. It is a transitory space *through which* connections between the Roman and Parthian Empires flow, but *in which* the urban centres of Mesopotamia do not participate.

Strabo's description of the movement of merchants along the Euphrates illustrates several ways that the sources reveal physical mobility. The first is through explicit notifications of movement, such as the route from Syria to Babylonia used by merchants (*ἐμπορευόμενοις*) as well as other groups who move along with them, including camel-guides (*καμηλῖται*). More common are implicit notifications, such as the existence of the reverse route from Babylonia to Syria. Strabo's narrative focuses exclusively on the Roman perspective and thus highlights Roman agency in trans-Mesopotamian movement. However, people and goods move in both directions and use routes in oblique ways not seen or foreseen by those who create and describe the routes. Another kind of implicit description is that conveyed by the construction of the narrative itself. Descriptions of space based on movement, such as itineraries or *periploi*, can often be seen within works of descriptive geography, even those that initially seem to take a broader, static and panoptic view.⁴² Strabo's descriptions often follow lines of communications afforded by rivers, roads or coastlines.⁴³ His inclusion of Edessa in this description of the Euphrates route implies that

42 See Chapter 4. Dueck (2000) 40–43.

43 Dueck (2000) 167–68.

Edessa was a feature on that route, as it was on the Euphrates routes described by other authors.

Two geographic sources describe the Euphrates route between Syria and Babylon in greater topographic detail than Strabo: Isidore of Charax and Ammianus Marcellinus describe a series of locations along the Euphrates between the Euphrates near Zeugma and Babylonia.⁴⁴ These three authors each describe and characterise the route in a different way and choose to include different sites, but the river provides a fixed physical feature from which those using the route seldom deviated.⁴⁵

The *Parthian Stations* (*Stathmoi Parthikoi*) of Isidore of Charax is probably an excerpt from a longer work on Parthia written in the first century BCE.⁴⁶ The *Parthian Stations* describes a route from the crossing of the Euphrates

44 Isidore 1; Amm. Marc. 23.2–24.6.

45 Although the route followed the Euphrates River, the journey does not seem to be conducted by boats, except for crossings. Prior to twentieth-century irrigation and hydro-electric projects, which regulate the flow of the river, the level of Euphrates was inconsistent and sandbars and flood debris were a hazard. Moreover, while the trip down river may have been relatively easy, the journey back against the flow was problematic for nineteenth century steamboats, let alone simpler forms of transport, Guest (1992). Herodotus (1.194) describes Armenians descending the Tigris to Babylon in boats made of skins and laden with goods for sale and donkeys for the return trip. The boatmen would sell the goats and the skins and return to Armenia on the donkeys. The passage is discussed in the context of Assyrian use of both the Tigris and Euphrates for transportation by Fales (1995) 211–15. Briant also discusses the passage, but transposes it from the Tigris to the Euphrates: Briant (1991) 77; Briant (2002) 379–80. The foundation charter of Darius' palace at Susa (DSf) describes Lebanese timber brought to Susa, presumably down the Euphrates, Briant (2002) 382. Conon's voyage to see Artaxerxes II included a passage down the Euphrates from Thapsacus to Babylon ("κάκειθεν εἰς Θάψακον τῆς Συρίας πορευθεὶς ἀνὰ τὸν Εὐφράτην ποταμὸν ἐπλευσεν εἰς Βαβυλῶνα"); Diod. 14.81.4; Briant (2002) 382. Strabo (16.1.11) notes that Alexander had boats constructed in Syria and sent down the river to Babylonia for his Arabian expedition, but that was a one way trip necessitated by the lack of appropriate building materials in Babylonia, Meiggs (1982); Briant (2002) 382, Arr. *Anab.* 7.20.2–4. Strabo (16.3.3) also reports Aristobulus' claim that the Gerrhans, spice merchants from southern Arabia, transport their goods to Babylonia on boats (σχεδιαίς) then they sail up (ἀναπλεῖν) the Euphrates to Thapsacus from where they distribute their goods (briefly discussed by Young (2011) 94). Another story which Strabo (1.3.1) relates as an example of the absurdity of a predecessor (Damastes of Sigeum, a 5th century BCE geographer and historian, Brodersen, 'Damastes', *BNP*) tells of a water voyage from Cilicia to Susa, can be interpreted to show a river voyage down the Euphrates, Briant (1991) 78–79; Briant (2002) 382–83; see also p. 277 for evidence that Palmyrene traders used riverine transport for the Euphrates leg of their desert routes.

46 Muller (1855) *Geographi Graeci Minores* (GGM) 1.244–54; FGh 781; Schoff (1989) an exact reprint of the 1914 edition; Oelsner, Joachim, 'Isidorus (2)' *BNP*. Chaumont (1984) 64; Gawlikowski (1988) 77–78.

at Zeugma to Alexandria in Arachosia, near modern Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. Müller suggested that Isidore is to be equated with Dionysius of Charax, whom Pliny relates was sent to the east to research a work on the Parthians for Gaius Caesar:

In this place [Charax], Dionysius was born, the author of a very recent description of the whole world, whom the Divine Augustus sent into the East to compose a complete account for his elder son [Gaius] who was about to go to Armenia to manage Parthian and Arabian matters. This did not escape my notice, nor did I forget that in introducing my work I said that each author seemed most careful in describing their own situation. Nevertheless, in this part I prefer to follow Roman armies and King Juba, in the volumes dedicated to the same Gaius Caesar describing the same Arabian expedition.⁴⁷

As Chaumont has pointed out, while it is possible that the Isidore of the *Parthian Stations* and Pliny's Dionysius are the same person, there is no requirement that they be so, nor is there a problem assuming they are different scholars from the same place working on similar projects.⁴⁸ In fact, their projects may have been quite different: Isidore seems to have written a history of Parthia, while Pliny says that Dionysius wrote a *terrarum orbis situs*. These works could have been as divergent as the primarily historical and geographical works of Livy and Strabo respectively, or as convergent as Herodotus' ethno-geographical history. One argument in favour of equating the two authors is that Pliny's list of sources for Book 6 includes an Isidorus but no Dionysius.⁴⁹

47 Pliny NH 6.141: "Hoc in loco genitum esse Dionysium, terrarum orbis situs recentissimum auctorem, quem ad commentanda omnia in orientem praemisit Divus Augustus ituro in Armeniam ad Parthicas Arabicasque res maiore filio, non me praeterit nec sum oblitus sui quemque situs diligentissimum auctorem visum nobis introitu operis: in hac tamen parte arma Romana sequi placet nobis Iubamque Regem, ad eundem Gaium Caesarem scriptis voluminibus de eadem expeditione Arabica."

48 Chaumont (1984) 64: "Il n'y a aucun inconvénient majeur à admettre l'existence de deux personnages bien distincts Dionysos et Isidore, citoyens de la même ville, adonnés l'un et l'autre à la même science." Gawlikowski deems the coincidence too unlikely and accepts Müller's correction, (1988) 78.

49 Pliny NH 1, libro VI: "Ex Auctoribus: M. Agrippa. M. Varrone. Varrone Atacino. Cornelio Nepote. Hygino. L. Vetere. Mela Pomponio. Domitio Corbulone. Licinio Muciano. Claudio Caesare. Arruntio. Seboso. Fabricio Tusco. T. Livio filio. Seneca. Nigidio. Externis: Iuba rege. Hecataeo. Hellanico. Damaste. Eudoxo. Dicaearcho. Baetone. Timosthene. Patrocle. Deomdamante. Clitarcho. Eratosthene. Alexandro Magno. Ephoro. Hipparcho. Panaetio. Callimacho. Artemidoro. Agathocle. Polybio. Timaeo Siculo. Alexandro polyhistore.

However, while Pliny mentions Dionysius, it is unclear if he used his work as a source. In *NH* 6.141, Pliny remarks on the existence and work of Dionysius, but does not claim him as a source. Rather, he notes that he prefers to follow (“in hac tamen parte ... sequi placet”) Roman military reports and Juba’s history for his own description of Arabia.

Most of the *Parthian Stations* focuses on the first part of the journey, between Zeugma and Seleucia on the Tigris, the Parthian capital of Babylonia.⁵⁰ This section of Isidore’s description takes the form of a list of named cities with intervening distances listed; for example:

Crossing the Euphrates after Zeugma (τὸ Ζεῦγμα) is the city of Apameia, then Daiara, a village; this is three *schoinoi* from Apameia and the Euphrates River. Then Charax Sidou, called Anthemusia by the Greeks, a city, five *schoinoi*. After that Koraia in Bartana, a fortress, three *schoinoi*.⁵¹

In this way, Isidore includes many towns but in little detail. He provides relative locational information for the sites mentioned in terms of distances between points on a line (“εἴτα Χάρακα Σίδου... πόλις, σχοῖνοι ἔ”). Moreover, he usually tells us the kind of place he is describing, be it a town, city, fortress, river, *et cetera*, and often gives one or two other details. Examples of the former from this passage are Apameia (πόλις... Ἀπάμεια), Daiara (Δαίαρα κώμη) and Koraia (Κοραία... ὀχύρωμα). An example of the latter is the longer description of Charax Sidou (“εἴτα Χάρακα Σίδου, ὑπὸ δὲ Ἑλλήνων Ἀνθεμουσιάς <καλουμένη>, πόλις, σχοῖνοι ἔ”) for which, as well as the relative locational information, Isidore gives the note that the Greeks call it Anthemusia. Whereas Strabo provided little topological detail in a passage filled with movement, Isidore describes the same route as a static catalogue of stopping points and seldom explicitly notes the presence or effect of movement on the landscape he describes. However, like Strabo, his work has a strong sense of directionality as the orderly linear procession of his narrative implies movement from Zeugma towards Babylonia and beyond.

Isidoro. Amometo. Metrodoro. Posidonio. Onesicrito. Nearcho. Megasthene. Diogneto. Aristocreonte. Bione. Dalione. Simonide minore. Basile. Xenophonte Lampsaceno.”

50 For the middle Euphrates section of Isidore’s route: Musil (1927) 227–32; Chaumont (1984); Gawlikowski (1988); Edwell (2008) 11–16. Young (2011) 21–23 considers Isidore and Strabo to be describing different routes.

51 Isidore 1: “διαβάντων τὸν Εὐφράτην κατὰ τὸ Ζεῦγμα πόλις ἐστὶν Ἀπάμεια, εἴτα Δαίαρα κώμη· ἀπέχει δὲ Ἀπαμείας καὶ τοῦ Εὐφράτου ποταμοῦ σχοῖνους ᾗ. εἴτα Χάρακα Σίδου, ὑπὸ δὲ Ἑλλήνων Ἀνθεμουσιάς <καλουμένη>, πόλις, σχοῖνοι ἔ. μεθ’ ἣν Κοραία ἢ ἐν Βατάνηι, ὀχύρωμα, σχοῖνοι ᾗ.”

The extant books of Ammianus' history of the Roman Empire contain many geographical sections, and still more were included in the lost books, notably his description of Mesopotamia itself.⁵² As well as dedicated geographic digressions, his accounts of Mesopotamia drew on his personal knowledge of the region. While it seems that he did not accompany Julian on that emperor's attack down the Euphrates, Ammianus' description of the campaign is informative about the communities along the route.⁵³ Like Isidore, Ammianus names many settlements and locations on the banks of the Euphrates, often with accompanying details on the nature and history of the places.⁵⁴ However, unlike Isidore, his descriptions are embedded in a narrative of movement. While Ammianus' account seldom refers to commercial activities, it reports the continued existence of many cities in the fourth century CE that Isidore had reported in the first century BCE. These survivals attest to a continuity of movement along the route and, most likely, to its commercial use during that time.⁵⁵

The detailed accounts of the route which survive in Isidore and Ammianus reveal the important centres along the Euphrates in the first century BCE and the fourth century CE. However, this is their most important contribution to the understanding of the Euphrates as a commercial route. Ammianus' account of Julian's campaign focuses on military matters. Isidore's itinerary is often said to be describing a trade route, but the text itself gives no indication of mercantile traffic or concern.⁵⁶ As Young points out, there is actually little evidence for traders using the Euphrates route, at least compared to the evidence for desert trade through Palmyra and the maritime route from India through Egypt.⁵⁷ Strabo's passage on merchant activity along the Euphrates is the best unambiguous evidence for trade along the Euphrates.⁵⁸ As the most direct

52 See Chapter 3.

53 Matthews (1989) 13.

54 Amm. Marc. 23.3.1–24.6.1.

55 The fate of the Euphrates route after the Romano-Sasanian treaty of 298 is unclear. If that treaty did make Nisibis the sole venue for inter-imperial trade then the primary victim would have been the legitimate inter-imperial commercial prospects of the Euphrates route. For the treaty, see Petrus Patricius, fr. 14 *FGrH* 4, p. 189, quoted in translation by Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 133. For the historical context, see Chapter 1 of the present volume; for an analysis of the treaties, see Chapter 7.

56 Kramer (2003); Young (2011) 7. The best example of this kind of description of Isidore's text is the title of the most widely available edition, originally published in 1914: *Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax: An Account of the Overland Trade Route Between the Levant and India in the First Century BC*, Schoff (1989).

57 Young (2011) 188.

58 Strabo 16.1.27.

path between the important imperial centres at Ctesiphon and Antioch, it is highly likely that merchants used this route to move between those cities, both as final destinations and as transit points for shipping goods further into their respective empires. Ammianus mentions a large fair at Batnae that was probably attended by merchants who travelled up the Euphrates from Babylonia, west from Adiabene and Nisibis, and east from the rest of the Roman Empire.⁵⁹ We have no reason to doubt that regular commercial traffic occurred along the Euphrates route at least until 298 CE, except in times of war and crisis.⁶⁰

These three descriptions of the Euphrates route show how the same path of movement could be treated in different ways depending on the selections and purpose of the author. The lack of mercantile activity in the accounts of Isidore and Ammianus Marcellinus highlight the commercial focus of Strabo. Moreover, the interaction with the places along the route as described by the former two authors lies in sharp contrast to the open, ambiguous spaces of the Skenitai in Strabo. In the latter's vision of the Mesopotamian Borderland, the focus is the purposeful movement itself, not the specific details of the route's topographical context.

3 Northern Routes

Since the rise of the Assyrian Empire, northern Mesopotamia had usually been under the rule of a single power and formed an internal corridor between the regions to the west and southeast. While the Euphrates route garnered several narrative descriptions over the Roman period, routes across the fertile northern part of Mesopotamia are more difficult to identify, despite this relative importance for local networks in the region, commercial and otherwise. This set of routes are well attested historically and were alluded to in many historical and geographical texts, as I will show in this section.

Since the second millennium BCE, a route linked the Euphrates near Zeugma to the Tigris near Nineveh.⁶¹ This route from the Assyrian heartland across the fertile plains of northern Mesopotamia to northern Syria and the Mediterranean passed through the regional centres of Nisibis and Harran, which were particularly important during periods of Assyrian power.

59 Amm. Marc 14.3.3.

60 Young (2011) 189. In practice, the upheavals of the third century probably meant trade was somewhat sporadic after the second century. The Euphrates route may have suffered from the establishment of Palmyrene desert routes, as argued by Kramer (2003).

61 Lloyd and Brice (1951) 80–81; Fales (1995) 207–8; Graf (1994) 180. Fales identifies the three candidates for the Euphrates crossing as Birecik, Carchemish and Til Barsip.

Remote imaging has identified a web of “hollow ways” around major northern Mesopotamian settlements from the Bronze Age to the Byzantine period.⁶² These broad, shallow, depressed paths formed by repeated travel show local networks of minor roads linking urban centres with their hinterlands and neighbouring centres. The discovery of extant networks of hollow ways shows that this northern Mesopotamian route connected local settlement networks of fields and pasturelands into a regional web of movement and commerce aligned along an east-west axis.⁶³ Although the periods during which these hollow ways were used cannot be precisely dated, documentary and epigraphic evidence indicates that long distance routes did exist under Assyrian dominion and that they were conceived of as long distance routes by contemporary administrators. Neo-Assyrian land-sale documents often refer to roads bordering plots of land under discussion.⁶⁴ These roads are usually small local roads, but sometimes “royal highways” leading to major regional centres are specified. Such royal roads were used to communicate between officials at the capital and administrators of important sites in northwestern Mesopotamia (including Harran) and were intentionally constructed for this purpose.⁶⁵

These roads established in earlier periods remained in use into the Roman period. The Achaemenid Persians incorporated the Assyrian roads into their extensive administrative communications network, and that network was in turn inherited by the Hellenistic kingdoms. The testimony of Greek authors from the Classical and Hellenistic periods allows a considerable degree of reconstruction of the Achaemenid road network and the specialised administration

62 Wilkinson et al. (2005); Ur (2003); Altaweel (2004).

63 Ur (2003) 111–12. Ur’s study examines hollow ways radiating from and linking Bronze Age and Byzantine sites in the Khabur watershed. Wilkinson et al. (2005) and Altaweel (2004) examine Assyrian (Iron Age) sites in the heartland of that empire along the Tigris. One such route seems to have linked Ashur and Hatra in the Parthian period, Wilkinson et al. (2005) 33; Curtis (2000). Ashur, an Assyrian capital and religious centre, was destroyed in 614 BCE, but after several centuries of sparse settlement a major resettlement began in the first century CE until it occupied the entire area of the old Assyrian town by the beginning of the third century CE (Hauser (1996) 57–58).

64 Fales (1990) 98–99; Kessler (1997); Wilkinson et al. (2005) 37; Altaweel (2004) 72–74. Texts mention roads linking Ashur to Dūr-Katlimmu on the lower Khabur (this was perhaps the road passing through Hatra, see above) and Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad) to Guzana (Tell Halaf) near Ra’s al-‘Ayn on the Upper Khabur, Wilkinson et al. (2005) 35–36; Altaweel (2004) 72.

65 Wilkinson et al. (2005) 37; Altaweel (2004) 73–74. Kessler doubts the degree of central control and administration of the road system, but not the existence and use of roads for communication: Kessler (1997); for Mesopotamia specifically, p. 131. For examples of the quantity and content of Assyrian state communications, see Parpola and Reade (1987).

it probably required.⁶⁶ Herodotus describes the royal road from Sardis to Susa, which he says crossed the Euphrates “between Cilicia and Armenia” (probably on the upper Euphrates near Melitene) then passed through “Armenia” for 56.5 parasangs before entering Matiene where it passed over the Tigris and two rivers called Zabatusa (probably the Botan and the Greater and Lesser Zabs).⁶⁷

66 Briant notes some evidence for the organised construction and maintenance of the Persian road system, (2002) 361–62, 927. Graf (1994) provides a more detailed study. Achaemenid documents are unconcerned with private trade, but there is indirect evidence for mercantile activity, Briant (2002) 377–87.

67 Hdt. 5.52: “Ἐχει γὰρ ἀμφὶ τῇ ὁδῷ ταύτῃ ὥδε. Σταθμοὶ τε πανταχῇ εἰσι βασιλῆιοι καὶ καταλύσεις κάλλισται, διὰ οἰκεομένης τε ἡ ὁδὸς ἅπασα καὶ ἀσφαλῆος. Διὰ μὲν γε Λυδίας καὶ Φρυγίης σταθμοὶ τείνοντες εἴκοσι εἰσι, παρασάγγαι δὲ τέσσερες καὶ ἐννήκοντα καὶ ἥμισυ. Ἐκδέκεται δὲ ἐκ τῆς Φρυγίης ὁ Ἄλυσ ποταμός, ἐπ’ ᾧ πύλαι τε ἔπεισι, τὰς διεξελάσαι πᾶσα ἀνάγκη καὶ οὕτω διεκπερᾶν τὸν ποταμόν, καὶ φυλακτῆριον μέγα ἐπ’ αὐτῷ. Διαβάντι δὲ ἐς τὴν Καππαδοκίην καὶ ταύτῃ πορευομένῳ μέχρι οὖρων τῶν Κιλικίων σταθμοὶ δυὼν δέοντές εἰσι τριήκοντα, παρασάγγαι δὲ τέσσερες καὶ ἑκατόν· ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖσι τούτων οὖροι διξὰς τε πύλας διεξελᾶς καὶ διξὰ φυλακτῆρια παραμείψαι. Ταῦτα δὲ διεξελάσαντι καὶ διὰ τῆς Κιλικίης ὁδὸν ποιευμένῳ τρεῖς εἰσι σταθμοὶ, παρασάγγαι δὲ πεντεκαίδεκα καὶ ἥμισυ. Οὖρος δὲ Κιλικίης καὶ τῆς Ἀρμενίης ἐστὶ ποταμός νηυσιπέρητος, τῷ οὐνόμα Εὐφρήτης. Ἐν δὲ τῇ Ἀρμενίῃ σταθμοὶ μὲν εἰσι [καταγωγέων] πεντεκαίδεκα, παρασάγγαι δὲ ἕξ καὶ πενήκοντα καὶ ἥμισυ, καὶ φυλακτῆριον ἐν αὐτοῖσι. Ἐκ δὲ ταύτης τῆς Ἀρμενίης ἐσβάλλοντι ἐς τὴν Ματινήν γῆν σταθμοὶ εἰσι τέσσερες <καὶ τριήκοντα, παρασάγγαι δὲ ἑπτὰ καὶ τριήκοντα καὶ ἑκατόν>. Ποταμοὶ δὲ νηυσιπέρητοι τέσσερες διὰ ταύτης ῥέουσι, τοὺς πᾶσα ἀνάγκη διαπορθεύσαι ἐστὶ, πρῶτος μὲν Τίγρης, μετὰ δὲ δευτέρος τε καὶ τρίτος ὡυτὸς ὀνομαζόμενος <Ζάβρατος>, οὐκ ὡυτὸς ἑὼν ποταμός οὐδὲ ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ῥέων· ὁ μὲν γὰρ πρότερος αὐτῶν καταλεχθεὶς ἐξ Ἀρμενίων ῥέει, ὁ δ’ ὕστερος ἐκ Ματινῶν· ὁ δὲ τέταρτος τῶν ποταμῶν οὐνόμα ἔχει Γύνδης, τὸν Κύρος διέλαβέ κοτε ἐς διώρυχας ἐξήκοντα καὶ τριηκοσίας. Ἐκ δὲ ταύτης ἐς τὴν Κισσίην χώρην μεταβαίνοντι ἔνδεκα σταθμοὶ, παρασάγγαι δὲ δύο καὶ τεσσεράκοντα καὶ ἥμισυ ἐστὶ ἐπὶ ποταμὸν Χοάσπην, ἔοντα καὶ τοῦτον νηυσιπέρητον, ἐπ’ ᾧ Σοῦσα πόλις πεπόλισται.” (Now the nature of this road is as I shall show. All along it are the king’s stages and exceedingly good hostelries, and the whole of it passes through country that is inhabited and safe. Its course through Lydia and Phrygia is the length of 20 stages, and 94.5 parasangs. Next after Phrygia it comes to the river Halys, where there is a defile, which must be crossed, and a great fortress to guard it. After the passage into Cappadocia, the road in that land as far as the borders of Cilicia is of 28 stages and 104 parasangs. On this frontier you must ride through two defiles and pass two fortresses; ride past these, and you will have a journey through Cilicia of three stages and 15.5 parasangs. The boundary of Cilicia and Armenia is a navigable river by the name of Euphrates. In Armenia there are 15 resting-stages, and 56.5 parasangs, and there is a fortress there. From Armenia the road enters the Matienian land, wherein are 34 stages and a 137 parasangs. Through this land flow four navigable rivers that must be passed by ferries, first the Tigris, then a second and third of the same name [Zab], yet not the same stream, nor flowing from the same source; for the first-mentioned of them flows from the Armenians and the second from the Matieni; and the fourth river is called Gyndes, that Gyndes which Cyrus parted once into 360 channels. When this country is passed, the road is in the Cissian land, where there are 11 stages and 42.5 parasangs, as far as yet another navigable river, the Choaspes, where stands the city of Susa.) Translation adapted from the Loeb. Briant

The relative locations of the Halys and Cilicia are a problem for Herodotus' description; a route crossing the Halys then passing through Cilicia, then crossing the Euphrates at Melitene is a somewhat circuitous route. It is likely that Herodotus has confused two major routes through Anatolia to Babylon which both passed through Mesopotamia but which entered the region in different areas. Dillemann argues for a Euphrates crossing at Melitene then a route through Nisibis to the Tigris and from there to Arbela.⁶⁸ These sites are shown on Map 6.2: Borderland Hubs. The alternative is a route passing through Phrygia to Cilicia without crossing the Halys, then continuing through Cilicia and the Amanus gates to a Euphrates crossing at or below Zeugma.⁶⁹ Scholarly consensus has Herodotus' route passing through the upper Tigris basin and crossing the Euphrates north of Samosata.⁷⁰ Herodotus' reference to the royal road in Cilicia may reflect a branch connecting western Anatolia to Syria, Phoenicia and Egypt, which would have connected to another Royal Road running across northern Mesopotamia from a Euphrates crossing in the vicinity of Zeugma or Carchemish to the Tigris and Babylonia.⁷¹ This latter route is probably that described in an Aramaic travel document from the Persian period which outlines the rations allocated to a messenger travelling from Susa to Egypt by way of Arbela, a place called Sa'lam, and from there to Damascus.⁷²

Major Macedonian foundations along the northern route indicate its importance in the Hellenistic period.⁷³ Seleucus founded Seleucia (Zeugma) and Apamea on the Euphrates, ensuring the primacy of that crossing regardless of where the previously important site of Thapsacus had been in the Achaemenid period.⁷⁴ Nisibis was also founded with the name Mygdonian Antioch early in this period, as is attested both by Pliny who attributes the foundation to

calculates a parasang to be around 5.4 km, Briant (2002) 357. Matiene is an area in the Zagros Mountains between Armenia and Media, near the sources of the Lesser Zab River, Wiesehöfer, Josef, "Matiane" *BNP*.

68 Dillemann (1962) 147–62; Graf (1994) 178–79.

69 Graf (1994) 178.

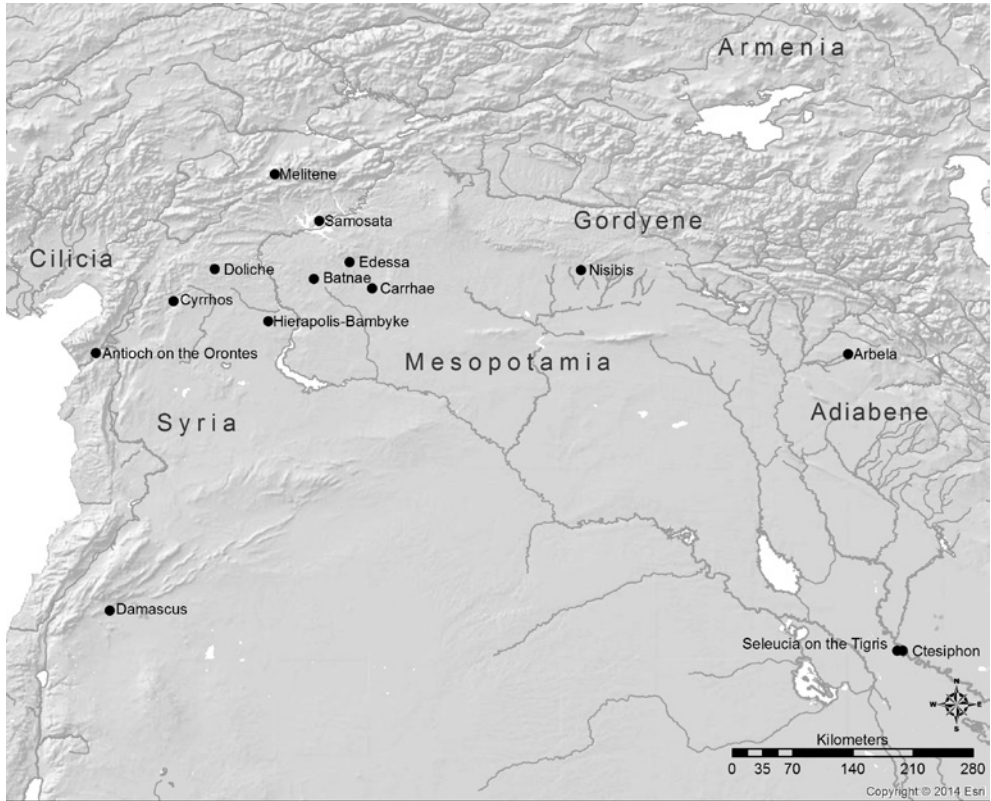
70 Although there are differences of opinion regarding where the road crossed the Euphrates thereafter: Cohen (2006) 190.

71 Graf (1994) 180–81. Remains of an Achaemenid garrison have been found near Carchemish, Briant (2002) 375–76 and Chapter 4.

72 DAE 67 (Grelot (1972)) = AD 6 (Driver (1957)). Graf (1994) 181; Briant (2002) 359, 364–65. Sa'lam is unidentified.

73 The Hellenistic aspects of the region are stressed by Strabo and Pliny, as discussed in Chapter 4. The focus is particular evident in Pliny 6.117. For a discussion of the Seleucid road system and royal movement, see Kosmin (2014) 167–69, 178–80.

74 Pliny (*NH* 5.86) emphasises the role of Zeugma as a pre-eminent river crossing (*transitu Euphratis nobile*). On the role of trade in the economy of Commagene, see Facella (2005b) 232–34.



MAP 6.2 Borderland hubs

Nicanor, a contemporary of Seleucus I, and by Polybius who uses the toponym “Mygdonian Antioch” in his account of the march of Antiochus III against the rebel Molon in Babylonia in 221/220 BCE.⁷⁵ In Polybius’ account of that campaign, Antiochus took the northern route from Syria to the Tigris then down the Tigris towards Babylonia, which, while slower, allowed Antiochus to cut off Molon from his base in Medea.⁷⁶

75 Pliny *NH* 6.117. Polybius 5.51.1–2: “Ἀντίοχος δὲ παραγενόμενος ἐπὶ τὸν Εὐφράτην καὶ προσαναλαβὼν τὴν δύναμιν αὐτὶς ἐξώρμα, καὶ διανύσας εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν τὴν ἐν Μυγδονίᾳ περὶ τροπᾶς χειμερινᾶς ἐπέμεινε, θέλων ἀποδέξασθαι τὴν ἐπιφορὰν καὶ τὴν ἀκμὴν τοῦ χειμῶνος. [2] μείνας δὲ περὶ τετταράκονθ’ ἡμέρας προῆγεν εἰς Λίββαν.” (Antiochus, on reaching the Euphrates, gave his troops a rest and then resumed his march. Arriving at Antioch in Mygdonia at about the winter solstice, he remained there, wishing to wait until the extreme rigour of the winter should be over. After passing forty days there he went on to Libba.) Loeb trans.

76 Polybius 5.51.10–11.

However, despite the historical importance of these northern routes, they seldom appear in the works of the Roman imperial geographic writers. Brief references or allusions appear in Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy. Strabo mentions Alexander's route through this northern urban area in passing and indistinctly, referring only to the place where he crossed the Tigris (ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ Τίγριος διάβασιν).⁷⁷ Strabo attributes this information to Eratosthenes, who used that crossing point as a broader geographical marker. A hint of the northern route may also be seen in an itinerary-like section of Pliny's narrative which describes a series of locations between Zeugma and the edge of Roman territory:

Apamea at Zeugma has been mentioned also, from which, heading east, one comes to Caphrena, a fortified town, formerly seventy stadia in size and called the "Palace of the Satraps." Tribute used to be brought here; now it is just a fortress. [120] Thebata is still in the same state as formerly, and Oruros, the limit of Roman power under Pompeius Magnus, 250 miles from Zeugma.⁷⁸

The section opens and closes with references to Zeugma. The origin point (Apamea) is located with respect to Zeugma (Apamea's twin city on the opposite bank of the Euphrates crossing), and the terminus is located by indicating the distance travelled from that origin point. As far as we can tell, the locations mentioned seem to indicate an easterly progression from Zeugma towards Oruros at the border ("ex qua orientem petentes ...").⁷⁹ It is likely that Pliny is describing part of the Mesopotamian section of this northern route from Roman Syria to Parthian Assyria. In the introduction to his *Geography*, Claudius Ptolemy refers to merchants who travel on this northern route. He describes how a merchant travelling from Syria to China crossed the Euphrates

77 Strabo 16.1.21: "τὸ μὲν οὖν μέγιστον ὃ ἀφίστανται διάστημα ἀπ' ἀλλήλων τὸ πρὸς τοῖς ὄρεσιν ἐστὶ· τοῦτο δ' ἂν εἴη τὸ αὐτὸ ὅπερ εἶρηκεν Ἑρατοσθένης, τὸ ἀπὸ Θαψάκου, καθ' ὃ ἦν τὸ ζεύγμα τοῦ Εὐφράτου τὸ παλαιόν, ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ Τίγριος διάβασιν, καθ' ἣν διέβη Ἀλέξανδρος αὐτόν, δισχιλίων τετρακοσίων." (Now the greatest distance by which the two rivers are separated is that towards the mountains; and this distance might be the same as that stated by Eratosthenes – I mean that from Thapsacus, where was the old bridge of the Euphrates, to the crossing of the Tigris, where Alexander crossed it – two thousand four hundred stadia ...).

78 Pliny, *NH* 6.119–120: "Dicta est et in Zeugmate Apamea; ex qua orientem petentes excipit oppidum Caphrena munitum, quondam stadiorum LXX amplitudine et Satraparum Regia appellatum quo tributa conferebantur, nunc in arcem redactum. [120] durant, ut fuere, Thebata et, ductu Pompei Magni terminus Romani imperi, Oruros, a Zeugmate CCL."

79 There is some risk of circularity here. Except for Zeugma and Apamea, these sites have not been securely identified and attempts to do so rely on this passage. See Chapter 5.

near Hierapolis, travelled across Mesopotamia to the Tigris, then through Assyria and Media to Ecbatana.⁸⁰ Ptolemy (via Marinus) cites the source of the distance measurements for this journey as Maes Titianus, “a Macedonian and merchant by family profession” whose agents travelled the route between Syria and China (or the Tarim Basin).⁸¹ Ptolemy reports that Marinus was dismissive of the reliability of merchant reports, but his own view is difficult to ascertain. His condemnation of Marinus seems to be restricted to that author’s exaggeration of the distance. Ptolemy considered this episode relevant to his methodological discussion but not to his description of the regions through which the route itself passed.

The third and fourth centuries CE saw the increasing development of northern Mesopotamia as both an area of important urban centres and a space of contact and conflict between the Roman and Sasanian Empires. Ptolemy’s trade route into Central Asia is reflected in Ammianus’ brief but illuminating description of an annual fair in Anthemusia:

The town of Batnae in Anthemusia, founded by a band of Macedonians in ancient times, is separated from the Euphrates River by a short distance. It is filled with wealthy merchants. During the annual festival around the beginning of September a great crowd of all sorts of people gather for nine days to trade goods sent from India and China, and many other things brought by land and sea.⁸²

80 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.11–12, especially 1.12.5: “Τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς κατὰ Ἱεράπολιν τοῦ Εὐφράτου διαβάσεως διὰ τῆς Μεσσοποταμίας ἐπὶ τὸν Τίγριν ὁδὸν καὶ τὴν ἐντεῦθεν διὰ Γαραμαίων τῆς Ἀσσυρίας καὶ Μηδίας εἰς Ἑκβάτανα καὶ Κασπίας Πύλας καὶ τῆς Παρθίας εἰς Ἑκατόμυλον ἐνδέχεται περὶ τὸν διὰ τῆς Ῥοδίας πίπτειν παράλληλον· οὗτος γὰρ καὶ κατ’ αὐτὸν γράφεται διὰ τῶν εἰρημένων χωρῶν.” (It is true that the route from the crossing of the Euphrates at Hieropolis through Mesopotamia to the Tigris, and from there through the Garamaioi in Assyria and Media to Ecbatana and the Caspian Gates and to Hekatompylos in Parthia, can be situated near the parallel with Rhodes, since this parallel, according to [Marinus], too, is drawn through the countries mentioned.) Trans. Berggren and Jones (2000) 73. On Marinus’ calculation of distances based on routes of travel, see Berggren and Jones (2000) 150–52.

81 Ptol. *Geog.* 1.11.6: “Μάην γάρ φησί τινα τὸν καὶ Τιτιανὸν, ἄνδρα Μακεδόνα καὶ ἐκ πατρὸς ἔμπορον, συγγράψασθαι τὴν ἀναμέτρησιν οὐδ’ αὐτὸν ἐπελθόντα, διαπεμφόμενον δὲ τινας πρὸς τοὺς Σήρας.” (For [Marinus] says that a certain Maes Titianus, a Macedonian and a merchant like his father, described the measurement, although he did not travel the route himself, but sent certain others to the Seres.) For a full analysis of the evidence and its implications of overland connections between the Roman Empire and Central Asia, see Andrade (2015).

82 Amm. Marc. 14.3.3: “Batnae municipium in Anthemusia conditum Macedonum manu priscorum, ab Euphrate flumine brevi spatio disparatur, refertum mercatoribus opulentis, ubi annua sollemnitate prope Septembris initium mensis, ad nundinas magna

Batnae, the chief city of Anthemusia, lay east of the Euphrates about half way to Edessa and is often linked to trade routes across Mesopotamia.⁸³ This reference appears in Ammianus' description of Julian's route down the Euphrates, but Strabo and Isidore included Anthemusia in their routes.⁸⁴ Importantly, Anthemusia lay to the west of the crossroad cities of Edessa and Carrhae, where the northern and Euphrates routes diverged. Batnae probably saw most of the goods imported from the east on their way to Antioch. The customs station at Zeugma mentioned by Philostratus may also have contributed to the commercial importance of Batnae as a last major city in which those moving west could sell goods before paying tax on them at the Euphrates.⁸⁵ This tax station was probably in major use both in the time of Philostratus (the late second and early third centuries) and that of his first-century subject Apollonius who encounters the station. By Ammianus' time, the treaty of 298 had made Nisibis the site of taxation for those conducting trade between the empires. Nevertheless, Batnae remained an important trading site, probably for some combination of historical reasons, distance from the border and Antioch, and proximity to both east-west and north-south routes. Demographic and geopolitical developments increased the importance of the northernmost set of routes between the empires and saw Nisibis become the focus of inter-state military, diplomatic and economic activity. Although Nisibis had been an important regional centre from Assyrian times and was mentioned relatively frequently (for a northern Mesopotamian city) in Greek and Roman sources, its history is not well known, in part owing to a paucity of archaeological evidence.⁸⁶ Nisibis' important role in the economic activity of northern Mesopotamia can be seen in the *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*.

4 *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*

The *Expositio* is particularly concerned with the productive and commercial qualities of the provinces and cities of the Roman Empire. While the *Expositio* does not describe the northern routes in detail, a close reading of

promiscuae fortunae convenit multitudo, ad commercanda quae Indi mittunt et Seres, aliaque plurima vehi terra marique consueta."

83 The "trade goods sent from India and China" certainly included textiles. For a discussion of the scanty evidence for the textile trade through Syria, see Seland (2014a).

84 Strabo 16.1.27; Isidore 1. It was important enough to be mentioned twice by Pliny, although he gives little to no detail on those occasions: Pliny *NH* 5.86 (Anthemusia); 6.118 (Anthemus).

85 Philostratus, *Apollonius* 1.20.1.

86 Cohen (2013) 62–67.

this text provides a valuable perspective on commercial activity in northern Mesopotamia, especially as regards inter-imperial trade.

The introduction of the work declares that commerce is a central organising principle of its geographic description.⁸⁷ It states that the work will outline the provinces and cities, what is outstanding (*possit esse praecipuum*) in both, and the nature of their wealth and power (*quales in substantia ac potestate*). The *Expositio* views both the power of a city and what makes a city important through a primarily economic lens. Its description of *Mesopotamia* and *Osdroena* (Osrhoene) is typical in this regard:

After this is our land; for Mesopotamia and Osrhene follow. Indeed, Mesopotamia has many diverse cities; I wish to speak of those which are outstanding. Namely, Nisibis and Amida, which have men who are the best men in all things, very acute in business, and good salesmen.⁸⁸ The cities are especially wealthy and supplied with all goods: for they receive sellers from Persia into the whole Roman Empire and send back buyers. Except bronze and iron, since it is not permitted to give bronze or iron to foreigners. But those cities are ever-standing by means of the forethought of the gods and the emperor, since they have famous walls, they always destroy

87 *Expositio* 2: "Quaerentes autem scribere, debemus dicere primum [quando mundus a deo fuerit institutus dehinc] quae gentes ab oriente usque ad occidentem constitutae sint; post hoc quanta sint genera barbarorum, deinde omnem Romanorum terram, quot sint in omni mundo provinciae, vel quales in substantia ac potestate; quae civitates in singulis provinciis habeant et quid in unaquaque provincia aut civitate possit esse praecipuum. Munificum enim hoc opus et studiosum mihi esse videtur." (But seeking to write, we ought to say first [...] which nations have been established from the east to the west; after this, how many kinds of barbarians, then the whole land of the Romans, how many provinces there are in the whole world, or what kind of wealth and power they have; which cities are in each province and what is outstanding in every province and city. For this work seems to me to be liberal and studious.).

88 Given the economic focus of the text and the passage, the appearance of *venantes*, probably a substantive participle from *venor*, to hunt ("very sharp in business and good hunters"), is strange. If we retain *venantes*, it might suggest an economic sense to the hunting. Live animals had been hunted in the Taurus Mountains for use in spectacles in the first century BCE (Cic. *Ad Fam.*, 2.11.2; cf *Ad Att.* 6.1.21) and *Expositio* 40 notes that a trade in pelts and animals still existed in Cappadocia. Several emendations have been proposed, Rougé (1966) 156; I incline towards Gronovius' suggestion (1697) that the text be emended to *vendentes*, "salesmen". *Vendentes* also occurs in the sentence that follows, but the *Expositio* does not shy from such repetition. This emendation would clearly fit with the economic focus of the passage.

the courage of the Persians in war. Fervent in business and dealing well with every province. Then Edessa of Osdroenae, also a very splendid city.⁸⁹

The *Expositio*'s description of *Mesopotamia* and *Osdroena* includes only three cities, Nisibis, Amida and Edessa, and contains no specific topographical or geophysical information (Map 6.3); a commercial perspective dominates this passage. Nisibis and Amida are populated by acute businessmen who travel throughout the entire empire for the purpose of trade.⁹⁰ In fact, the line "accipientes enim a Persis ipsi in omnem terram Romanorum vendentes et ementes iterum tradunt" ("for they receive sellers from Persia into the whole Roman Empire and send back buyers") is no mere rhetorical flourish concerning the trading activity of Mesopotamian merchants, but a reflection of the special legal status of Nisibis as the "place of transactions" between the two empires, as mandated by the treaty of 298 CE.⁹¹ One reason for Nisibis' role as a treaty-mandated trade centre was its position on these important northern routes. By virtue of their geographical, diplomatic and legal positions between the Roman and Sasanian Empires, the cities themselves were venues for inter-imperial trade networks. The *Expositio* focuses on the commercial advantages of the selected cities and attributes the wealth of the Mesopotamian cities to their use as sites of inter-regional trade, especially between regions which lay on either side of the imperial border.⁹²

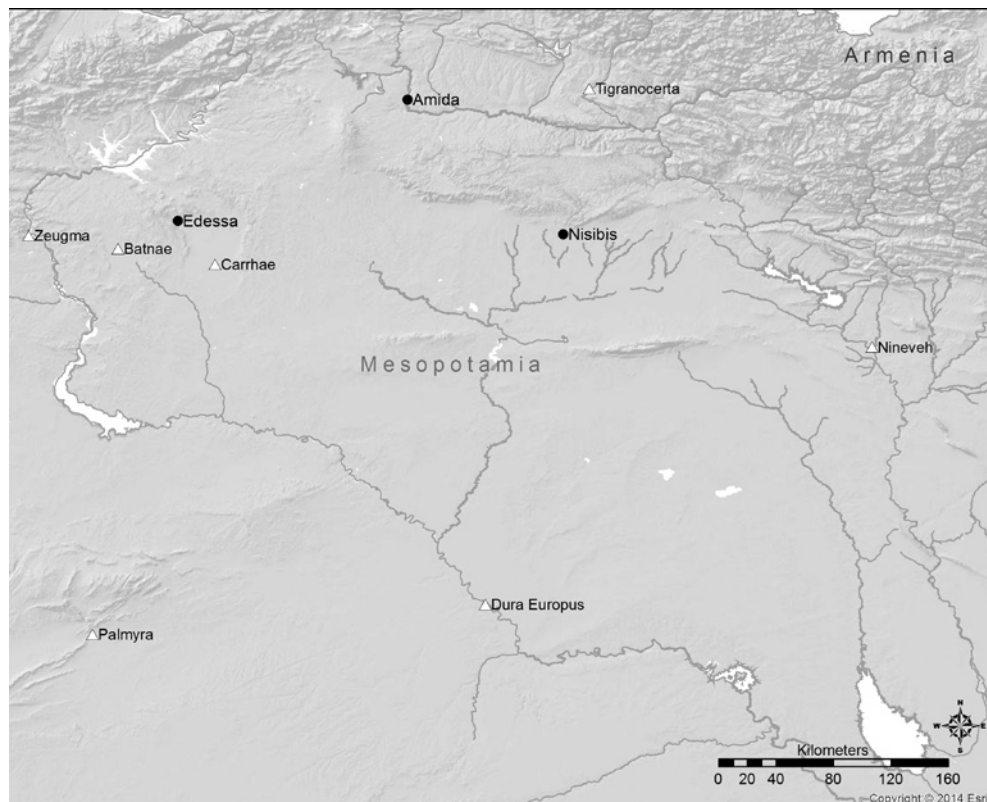
In this economic view of Near Eastern geography, the Persian Empire plays a significant role. The *Expositio* reports that the Persians are so wealthy because

89 *Expositio* 22: "Post hos nostra terra est. Sequitur enim Mesopotamia et Osdroena. Mesopotamia quidem habet civitates multas et varias, quarum excellentes sunt quas volo dicere. Sunt ergo Nisibis et <Amida> quae in omnibus viros habent optimos et in negotio valde acutos et bene venantes. Praecipue et divites et omnibus bonis ornati sunt: accipientes enim a Persis ipsi in omnem terram Romanorum vendentes et ementes iterum tradunt, extra aera-men et ferrum, quia non licet hostibus dare aera-men aut ferrum. Istaе autem civitates semper stantes deorum et imperatoris sapientia, habentes moenia inclita, bello semper virtutem Persarum dissolvunt; ferventes negotiis et tranigentes cum omni provincia bene. Deinde Osdroenae Edessa et ipsa civitas splendida." For the emendation of a duplicate Edessa for Amida, see Chapter 3.

90 *Expositio* 22: "... quae in omnibus viros habent optimos et in negotio valde acutos et bene venantes." (... men who are the best men in all things, very acute in business, and good salesmen.).

91 For more on these treaties, especially as regards Nisibis, see Chapter 7.

92 *Expositio* 22: "Praecipue et divites et omnibus bonis ornati sunt: accipientes enim a Persis ipsi in omnem terram Romanorum vendentes et ementes iterum tradunt" (The cities are especially wealthy and supplied with all goods: for they receive sellers from Persia into the whole Roman Empire and send back buyers.).



MAP 6.3 Cities of the *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*

of their trade connections with their neighbours.⁹³ Inter-imperial trade between Romans and Persians is an important feature of the eastern provinces. Trade at Bostra in south-east Syria is closely linked to that city's proximity to the Persians and Saraceni.⁹⁴ Similarly, luxury goods from Babylon are among Cappadocia's notable exports.⁹⁵ As well as trading with the people of Bostra,

93 *Expositio*, 19: "abundare dicuntur in omnibus; data enim <potestate negotii gentibus adpropinquantibus suae regionis, ad eos omnia> abundare videntur". ([The Persians] are said to abound in all things; for since the power has been given to them to conduct business with their neighbouring regions, they seem to flourish.).

94 *Expositio*, 38: "Bostra, quae negotia maxima habere dicitur, propinqua Persis et Saracenis, in qua publicum opus tetrapyli mirantur." (Bostra, which is said to have excellent business affairs, neighbouring the Persians and Saracens, in which a public monument can be admired, a tetrapylon.) Translation of the last clause follows Rougé (1966) 176–77.

95 *Expositio*, 40: "Negotia autem haec optima ubique mittere eam aiunt: leporinam vestem et babylonicarum pellium et illorum divinatorum animalium formositatem." (These excellent businessmen are said to send their goods everywhere: rabbit-fur clothing, Babylonian

the Saraceni live through banditry (“<arcu et> rapina sperantium suam vitam transigere”), a different form of economic transaction.⁹⁶

For the *Expositio*, the Near East is a space of long-range commercial movement. By naming only three Mesopotamian cities, the *Expositio* focuses attention on what the author considered to be the most important urban centres of the region. They are not seen in the context of local networks of movement and small-scale production, but in terms of long distance trading networks: as a gateway for goods between the Sasanid Persian and Roman Empires (“accipientes enim a Persis ipsi in omnem terram Romanorum vendentes et ementes iterum tradunt”). The importance of this trade is evident in the frequency with which both empires sought to regulate and control it in their treaties.⁹⁷

5 Desert Routes

The final set of inter-imperial routes of movement through the Mesopotamian Borderland were the caravan paths through the north Syrian desert operated by Palmyrene traders. Pliny's description of Palmyra gives a general overview of these routes of movement between the Roman and Parthian worlds. Archaeological exploration along the Euphrates, and through the desert itself, allows us to locate these routes more precisely and build a more nuanced picture of the operation of Palmyra's desert trade. After examining the evidence for the location and operation of the desert routes, I will address two questions: What was the relationship between Palmyra and Dura? Did these north Syrian desert routes live and die with Palmyra? Finally, I will argue that, while Pliny is our only geographical source for these routes, something of the operation of local networks in the Palmyrene hinterland can be seen by comparing Ptolemy's catalogue of that area with the near-contemporary Palmyrene Tax Law of 137 CE. In all, Palmyra provides an illuminating case study of the interaction between inter-imperial and local networks of trade and the social, cultural and political factors which can accompany commercial movement.

leather, and beautiful horses of the imperial stud.) Translation of the last clause follows Rougé (1966) 176–77.

96 *Expositio*, 20: “Horum autem prope Sarracenorum gens degit, <arcu et> rapina sperantium suam vitam transigere. (The Saracen people live near [the Persians], taking what they want for their livelihood by plundering and the bow.) Translation of the last clause follows Rougé (1966) 154–55.

97 Lee (1993) 62–63; Amm. Marc. 25.7.9–14; Boeft et al. (2005) 233–50.

Of all the cities Pliny mentions in the Mesopotamian Borderland, Palmyra is the one to which he devotes the most attention, with a particular focus on broad networks of contact:

Palmyra is a city famous for its position, the richness of its soil, and the quality of its water, its fields surrounded on all sides by a vast circuit of sand, as if cut off from the world by nature itself, a private lot between two great empires of Rome and Parthia, and at the first sign of discord between them, always a concern to both. It is distant 337 miles from Seleucia of the Parthians, generally known as Seleucia on the Tigris, 203 from the nearest part of the Syrian coast, and 27 less from Damascus.⁹⁸

Pliny conceives of Palmyra as a hub in a network of trade and movement. He begins his description by isolating Palmyra: "Its fields are surrounded on all sides by a vast circuit of sand, as if cut off from the world by nature itself".⁹⁹ He then bridges that desert by offering two routes of movement and communication that connect Palmyra to the larger world. The first is a geopolitical connection, namely the liminal political space that Palmyra occupied between Rome and Parthia ("a private lot between two great empires of Rome and Parthia"), which will be discussed in Chapter 7. The second connection Pliny draws is concerned with the practicalities of movement and communication. Pliny notes that Palmyra "is distant 337 miles from Seleucia of the Parthians, generally known as Seleucia on the Tigris, 203 from the nearest part of the Syrian coast, and 27 less from Damascus". Pliny's distances link Palmyra to the Parthian capital Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the Mediterranean, and Roman Damascus. Pliny's geography is based on human activity and Roman control of space, not mathematical description, so these distances reflect the presence of well-trodden caravan routes connecting Palmyra to Roman and Parthian centres.¹⁰⁰

Palmyra's position at an oasis in a valley midway between Damascus and the Euphrates meant it was well placed to exploit desert trade routes between Syria and Babylonia and between Anatolia and southern Syria.¹⁰¹ By the second

98 Pliny, NH 5.88: "Palmyra urbs nobilis situ, divitiis soli et aquis amoenis, vasto undique ambitu harenis includit agros, ac velut terris exempta a rerum natura, privata sorte inter duo imperia summa Romanorum Parthorumque, et prima in discordia semper utrimque cura. Abest ab Seleucia Parthorum, quae vocatur Ad Tigrim, CCCXXXVII [m.]p., a proximo vero Syriae litore CCIII et a Damasco XXVII propius."

99 Pliny 5.88: "vasto undique ambitu harenis includit agros ac, velut terris exempta a rerum natura". For the topographical aspects of Pliny's description, see Chapter 4.

100 On these figures, see Chapter 4.

101 On the operation and vectors of Palmyrene trade, see the work of Eivind Seland and the Syrian-Norwegian research project *Palmyrena: City, Hinterland and Caravan trade between Orient and Occident* (2009–2013, <http://www.org.uib.no/palmyrena/>), especially Seland

century CE, the strength of those trade connections led Appian to anachronistically project that wealth back to the first century BCE in his narrative of Antony's activities in the East.¹⁰² Pliny specifically notes distances between Palmyra and three major route termini (Seleucia on the Tigris, Damascus, and the Mediterranean coast), but he lists only the destinations he considered most important for his project.¹⁰³ While we know of several sites along the Euphrates in which Palmyrene traders and caravan guides operated, no extant inscriptions refer to Palmyrene trading activities between Palmyra and the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, evidence from Palmyrene inscriptions suggests that Seleucia and Babylonia were not particularly important nodes in the network of Palmyrene trade at its height. The two earliest trade-related inscriptions from Palmyra refer to these cities: one dated to 19 CE, which probably refers to

(2014b); Seland (2015a) and the collected conference volume Meyer et al. (2016). The central role played by trade in the development of Palmyra and Palmyrene culture has been recently analysed by Smith (2013). In particular, he argues that trade at Palmyra was a civic enterprise (Smith (2013) 140–43), that the growth of the community was linked to trade (Smith (2013) 74–75), and that the trade had a fundamentally public nature (Smith (2013) 77–78).

102 Appian (*BC* 5.9) wrote that when Antonius sent a force to plunder Palmyra in 41 BCE, the Roman general used the justification that the Palmyrenes had avoided taking sides in Rome's conflicts against the Parthians because “ἐμποροὶ γὰρ ὄντες κομίζουσι μὲν ἐκ Περσῶν τὰ Ἰνδικὰ ἢ Ἀράβια, διατίθενται δ' ἐν τῇ Ῥωμαίων” (For they are merchants who bring Indian and Arabian goods from Persia and sell them in Roman territory). By having Antonius justify his attack in terms of Palmyrene mercantile traffic, Appian presents that traffic as ongoing in the late first century BCE. However, there is no evidence that this was the case. Appian's account is most likely an anachronistic projection of Palmyra's mid-second century success; Palmyrene merchants were certainly active and well-known in this regard when Appian wrote his histories. For further discussion of this incident, with references, see Chapter 7.

103 Pliny's project was to present the world in relation to Roman power, thus Palmyra's position as a point of contact between the Roman world (Damascus and the Mediterranean) and the Parthian world (as represented by the pre-eminent “Greek” city in Babylonia, Seleucia on the Tigris) was important; see Chapter 7. The representation of Parthian power through a city with a clearly Macedonian toponym (Seleucia) fits with Pliny's prioritisation of Hellenistic urban spaces in Parthian space.

104 As Seland (2015a) notes, the surviving inscriptions seem to commemorate aid to caravans in extraordinary circumstances perhaps less likely to occur in the relatively short journeys to the west. Gawlikowski (2016) 24–25 suggests that the goods the Palmyrene merchants brought west mostly supplied the Syrian market, especially Emesa, Damascus and Apamea, while Antioch (and northern Syria) could be supplied more cheaply by the Northern or Euphrates routes through Zeugma and southern and coastal Syria by the Red Sea route. On the contrary, Terpstra (2016) interprets the remains of a Palmyrene temple at Rome as part of a Palmyrene trading diaspora.

Seleucia on the Tigris, and another from 24 CE, which refers to Babylon.¹⁰⁵ However, no further inscriptions mention those cities. Rather, starting in the mid-first century CE, many texts refer to Vologesias and (Spasinou) Charax.¹⁰⁶ These cities were further south, away from the main centre of Parthian power in Babylonia, and both may have been part of the independent kingdom of Mesene, near the mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates, during the time of Palmyrene contact. Charax certainly was, as the capital of Mesene, while Vologesias was located southwest of Babylon and seems to have been controlled by Mesene in the first half of the second century.¹⁰⁷ Gawlikowski argues that after 19 CE, that is, for most of the period of Palmyra's ascendancy, Palmyrene trade routes connected Roman space with Mesene and from there by sea to the Saka kingdoms of northwest India, thus bypassing Parthian territory.¹⁰⁸ However, it is difficult to determine when the focus of Palmyrene trade switched from

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- 105 Gawlikowski (1988) 91; Smith (2013) 76: Babylon: *PAT* 1352 (= *Inv.* IX.11 = *CIS* II, 3915) from 24 CE; Seleucia: *PAT* 0270 (= *Inv.* IX.6 = *CIS* II, 3924) in 19 CE. The second inscription refers only to "Seleucia", without further specification. Seleucia on the Tigris is the most important so-named city in the region, so is the most likely candidate. Gawlikowski (2016) argues that the ambiguity in the inscription removes any epigraphic link between Palmyra and the overland route into Asia. Gregoratti (2010) explains the single early reference to Seleucia by arguing that Seleucian support for his rival led Vologases I (51–78 CE) to punish the city and to establish Vologesias as a rival commercial centre.
- 106 Vologesias is mentioned in 8 of the inscriptions collated by Gawlikowski (1994): *Inv.* X, 112 (= *PAT* 1412) (140 CE); *Inv.* IX, 14 (*CIS* II, 3916) (142 CE); *Inv.* X, 124 (= *PAT* 1419) (150 CE); Chr. Dunant, *Sanctuaire de Baalshamîn* III, no. 45 (132 CE); Unpublished, from Allat temple, 144 CE (Gawlikowski (1994) 32, no.15); Milik (1972) 12–14, Umm el 'Amed (145/146 CE); *Inv.* III, 29 (*CIS* II, 3949) (211 CE); *Inv.* III, 21 (*CIS* II, 3933) (247 CE). Spasinou Charax is mentioned in 16: Cantineau, *RA* 27 (1930), no. 34 (50/51 or 70/71 CE); *Inv.* X, 7 (= *PAT* 1366) (Between 28–88 CE); *Inv.* X, 40 (= *PAT* 1376) (81 CE); *Inv.* X, 38 (= *PAT* 1374) (131 CE); *Inv.* X, 81 (= *PAT* 1397) (135 CE); *Inv.* X, 114 (= *PAT* 1414) (138 CE); *Inv.* X, 112 (= *PAT* 1412) (140 CE); Rostovtzeff (1935); Schlumberger (1961) (89–188 CE); Milik (1972) 12–14, Umm el 'Amed (145/146 CE); *Inv.* X, 111 (= *PAT* 1411) (156 CE); *Inv.* X, 90 (= *PAT* 1399) (157 CE); *Inv.* X, 107 (= *PAT* 1409) (159 CE); Cantineau (1938) (159 CE); *Inv.* X, 29 (= *PAT* 1373) (161 CE); *Inv.* X, 19 (no date); *Inv.* III, 28 (= *CIS* II, 3948) (193 CE). See also the discussions in Gawlikowski (1983) 63–66; and Smith (2013) 76–77.
- 107 On the political status of Mesene in the second century: Potter (1991); Bowersock (1989); Bernard (1990) 28–52; Gawlikowski (1994) 29–30; Gregoratti (2010). Some aspects of Nodelman (1960) remain valuable. On the location of Vologesias: Chaumont (1974); Gawlikowski (1994) 29; despite Maricq (1959).
- 108 Matthews (1984) 164–66; Gawlikowski (1994) 29; Young (2011) 139–48; Seland (2015a) 119–21. Two of Gawlikowski's inscriptions mention travel by ship to "Scythia" (*Inv.* X, 96; Seyrig (1950) 6 (157 CE); Milik (1972) 32–33 (Cantineau (1933) 187–88; *Inv.* X, 95 and 91) (157 CE). The identification of these references to "Scythia" with the Saka kingdoms belongs to Seyrig (1936); *Periplus maris erythraei* 38, 41, 48, 57 (Casson (1989) esp. 186). Young suggests that Mesene may have even been a Roman client kingdom after Trajan's campaign, (2011) 146–48. Gregoratti (2010) suggests that the shift in trade from Seleucia to Vologesias was initially the result of Arsacid policy.

Parthian Babylonia to Mesene because the overwhelming majority of inscriptions commemorating this trade between Palmyra and Mesene were created in the mid-second century (131–161 CE) between Hadrian's cessation of hostilities on the eastern frontier and before the unrest that dominated the end of the second century.¹⁰⁹ Only three inscriptions fall between 24 and 131 CE, all of which refer to Spasinou Charax, and one or two reflect conditions before Pliny's time. After the epigraphic boom of the second century, there is another hiatus in caravan inscriptions between 161 and 193. Smith suggests that this gap was due to the disastrous plague which broke out in Babylon in 165 and spread throughout both the Parthian and Roman Empires until around 189.¹¹⁰ Inscriptions resume in 193 and continue until 266. The period during which Mesene seems to have been the dominant trading destination for Palmyrene merchants thus post-dated Pliny's account.¹¹¹ Moreover, Pliny's account precedes the main periods of hostility between the Parthian and Roman Empires.

Between Palmyra and these Babylonian destinations were several transit points and way stations, particularly along the Euphrates. At Dura Europus, Ana, Telbis and Hit, goods borne by camel caravans could be reloaded onto boats for the journey downstream and offloaded from boats for the desert transit to Palmyra.¹¹² There is no epigraphic evidence of caravans passing through Dura Europus, nor did Poidebard's aerial photography find trace of a road, but recent Franco-Syrian excavations at the so-called Palmyrene Gate in the west wall of Dura suggested that a road ran south-west towards the Wadi

¹⁰⁹ Smith (2013) 79; Young (2011) 147–48.

¹¹⁰ Smith (2013) 80, 211n143. For the plague generally, see Duncan-Jones (1996). The gap in the epigraphic record could have been caused by a change in the fashion of display, but if so it would run counter to the general trend in the wider empire recognised by MacMullen (1982) of a steady rise in epigraphic behaviour until the time of Septimius Severus. It could also be an accident of survival. However, the coincidence of the gap and the historical context is compelling.

¹¹¹ See also Seland (2011) for a description of the routes available for travel to and from north-west India.

¹¹² Mouterde and Poidebard (1931); Teixidor (1984) 23; Gawlikowski (1983) esp. 59–62; Starcky and Gawlikowski (1985) 79–80; Gawlikowski (1988) 87; Gawlikowski (1994) 31; Dirven (1996) 43, especially n. 19; Young (2011) 148–49; Seland (2011); Smith (2013) 145; Seland (2015a) 113; Kennedy (1986). The role of the Palmyrene community at Dura Europus in long distance trade is debated, but highly likely, Dirven (1996). Circesium (Phaliga) may also have been such a transfer point: Will (1992) 89. An inscription found at Umm el 'Amed, in the desert 22km southeast of Palmyra, which mentions a statue to be erected at the Station of Gennaë: Mouterde and Poidebard (1931); Milik (1972) 12–14, Umm el 'Amed (145/146 CE). Umm el 'Amed: Smith (2013) 141, 232n130. Matthews (1984) 167 argues that Umm el 'Amed and Gennaë are the same place.

es-Swab and the road between Hit and Palmyra.¹¹³ Furthermore, Dirven has argued that the dedication of a small temple to Bel and Iarḥhibol by a pair of Palmyrenes from different tribes reflects the beginning of Dura's participation in Palmyrene caravan routes from a quite early date.¹¹⁴ No one disputes that a mercantile relationship existed between the two sites, but it is unclear whether that relationship was solely based in local trade between the two cities and their hinterlands, or whether Dura Europus was a station on longer Palmyrene caravan routes.¹¹⁵

Because water-born travel was usually cheaper than land travel, it would have been more efficient to maximise travel-distance spent on the river.¹¹⁶ The Euphrates was navigable in the downstream direction from Dura Europus, but in the upstream direction only as far as Hit, about twice as far from Palmyra.¹¹⁷ Dirven argues that caravans travelling between Palmyra and Mesene would cross the desert to Dura Europus (about half the distance from Palmyra as Hit) and transfer their cargo onto boats for the journey downstream, but that caravans travelling in the opposite direction had to disembark at Hit for the desert crossing back to Palmyra.¹¹⁸ This hypothesis would explain why Dura is not mentioned in Palmyrene caravan inscriptions, since those inscriptions commemorate journeys that enriched the city by successfully completing journeys *back* to Palmyra, and thus travelled by way of Hit. However, as Smith points out in his detailed examination of the evidence for interactions between the two cities, while the evidence is suggestive and likely, it is inconclusive and unproven.¹¹⁹

While these methods illuminate activity along the desert routes during the period of Palmyrene flourishing, the question of the chronological extent of their use before and after that time remains. In his study of trade routes

113 Poidebard (1934) 115–117 (Palmyre – Doura), 105–114 (Palmyre – Hit); Leriche (1996) 246; Dirven (1996) 42–43.

114 Dirven (1996) 47–51.

115 Edwell (2008) 111 sums up the arguments for each side. See also Dirven (1999) 40 n. 3; Starcky and Gawlikowski (1985) 80; Will (1992) 89–93.

116 In the 19th century, British experiments with an overland route between the Mediterranean and India along the Euphrates illustrated several problems with riverine transport through a borderland region. See Guest (1992).

117 Gawlikowski (1983) 53–68; Dirven (1996) 43–44; Smith (2013) 156.

118 Dirven (1996) 44–45; Seland (2015a) 113–15. Smith includes a photograph of a Palmyrene relief depicting a ship which he suggests may have been the type used for these Euphrates sections, (2013) 78; Seland (2015a) 113–15 also includes images. The presence of a *collegia* of makers of leather rafts at Palmyra may also attest to Euphrates transport, Seyrig (1963) 159–66; Smith (2013) 109.

119 Smith (2013) 151–57, esp. 155: “While this is the most likely interpretation of Palmyrene civilian activities at Dura, it remains a generalization not entirely borne out by the evidence.”

between Rome and peoples to the east, Young raises the question of whether Palmyra's location on these cross-desert trade routes was fortunate or whether Palmyrene merchants took action to draw trade to new routes which they had created.¹²⁰ Young argues that the Palmyrene routes across the desert were not "natural" trade routes and that the Palmyrenes created them by providing protection, shelter and supplies to travelling merchants.¹²¹ The literary record is largely silent, but there are two earlier accounts of desert crossings which bear investigation.

It is unclear whether our earliest descriptions of desert routes in the region refer to the same cross-desert routes later used by Palmyrene caravans. Two descriptions of desert crossings survive: one written by Arrian in the second century CE describes two much earlier crossings, the other written by Herodotus in the fifth century BCE describes a crossing a century before his time. Arrian of Nicomedia (L. Flavius Arrianus) was a second century CE Roman author, administrator and military officer most famous for his *Anabasis* of Alexander's campaigns.¹²² Among his other works was an *Indica*, which described Nearchus' voyage from the mouth of the Indus to the lower Tigris and Euphrates in the late fourth century BCE.¹²³ Only fragments of the *Indica* remain, one of which describes Achaemenid and Hellenistic use of a desert route between Egypt and Babylonia:

But those relief troops of Cambyses' army sent from Egypt to Susa and those sent by Ptolemy [I Soter] son of Lagos to the aid of Seleucus Nicator in Babylon [5] marched across an isthmus of Arabian land in eight days, quickly traversed the whole waterless and barren land on camels, bearing their water on camels as well, and travelling by night because they were unable to bear the open sky during the day on account of the burning heat. [6] The region beyond this isthmus between the Arabian Gulf and the Erythrean Sea is so uninhabitable because the northernmost parts are desert and sand.¹²⁴

120 Young (2011) 137–38.

121 Recall the activities of Strabo's Skenitai in support of merchants in that author's description of the Euphrates route. Young's suggestion that these desert routes were not "natural" trade routes is slightly problematic. In fact, such routes were quite natural to desert pastoralists. The genius of the Palmyrene merchants' use of these routes lay in the interface between Roman trade and the desert lifestyle of the people of the region.

122 Stadter (1980) 1–18.

123 For Strabo's use of Nearchus' work, see Chapter 2.

124 Arr. *Ind.* 43.4–6: "ἀλλὰ οἱ ἀπ' Αἰγύπτου γὰρ ἐς Σοῦσα ἀποσωθέντες τῆς στρατῆς τῆς Καμβύσεω καὶ οἱ παρὰ Πτολεμαίου τοῦ Λάγου παρὰ Σέλευκον τὸν Νικάτορα σταλέντες ἐς Βαβυλῶνα [5] διὰ τῆς Ἀραβίης χώρας ἰσθμὸν τινα διαπορευθέντες ἐν ἡμέρῃσιν ὀκτῶ ταῖς πάσαις ἀνδρῶν

Arrian mentions two specific desert crossings using this route from Egypt to Babylonia: the first by an Achaemanid army in the mid-sixth century BCE, the second by a Ptolemaic army in the early-third. Herodotus also mentions a desert crossing by Cambyses, the context of which strongly suggests that the account refers to a crossing of the Sinai Peninsula; Herodotus reports that an “Arab” king loaded waterskins onto camels to allow Cambyses and his army to cross a desert.¹²⁵ Arrian’s account is vague on the geography of the trans-Arabian route, so it is difficult to determine how he conceived of the relationship between his narrative of a cross-desert march by Cambyses’ army and Herodotus’ similar account, of which he was certainly aware. Arrian’s note that the journey only took eight days suggests that he, too, is referring to a desert portion of the much longer journey between Egypt and Babylon, such as a crossing of the Sinai. However, his account implies that the isthmus crossed in eight days (διὰ τῆς Ἀραβίης χώρας ἰσθμὸν τινα διαπορευθέντες ἐν ἡμέρησιν ὀκτώ) and the isthmus between the Arabian Gulf and the Erythrean sea (ἦντινα ἰσθμὸν ἀπεφαίνομεν ἐκ τοῦ κόλπου τοῦ Ἀραβίου κατήκοντα ἐς τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν) are the same.¹²⁶ Arrian may have mistakenly equated the two desert passages based on the similarity of the camel-borne water-supply methods. To further complicate matters, descriptions of routes following the Euphrates often include sections which pass through areas of waterless desert.¹²⁷ Thus, while Arrian may refer here to the use of the desert routes between Syria and Babylonia, it is by no means clear.

Young’s argument that the Palmyrenes created these commercial routes seems likely, but it is largely an argument from silence. Young suggests that because neither Strabo nor Isidore mention the Palmyrene route to the Euphrates, that route was not as prominent.¹²⁸ However, Isidore is explicitly

καὶ ἐρήμην χώραν ἐπήλθον ἐπὶ καμήλων σπουδῇ ἐλαύνοντες ὕδωρ τε σφιν ἐπὶ τῶν καμήλων φέροντες καὶ νυκτοπορέοντες· τὰς γὰρ ἡμέρας ὑπαίθριοι ἀνέχεσθαι διὰ καύμα ἀδύνατοι ἦσαν. [6] τοσούτου δεῖ τὰ γε ἐπέκεινα ταύτης τῆς χώρας, ἦντινα ἰσθμὸν ἀπεφαίνομεν ἐκ τοῦ κόλπου τοῦ Ἀραβίου κατήκοντα ἐς τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν, οἰεόμενα εἶναι, ὅποτε τὰ πρὸς ἄρκτον μάλλον αὐτῶν ἀνέχοντα ἔρημά τέ ἐστι καὶ ψαμμώδεα.” Briant (2002) 360. Arrian is referring to a force sent by Cambyses to Susa in response to the palace rebellion of Smerdis/Bardiya just before Cambyses’ death; Herodotus describes Smerdis’ coup at 3.61–67 and Briant gives a detailed analysis of the affair, (2002) 97–106.

125 Hdt 3.9. Herodotus gives the geographical context at 3.5 and the details of the Sinai water caches at 3.6–7. For this campaign, see Cruz-Urbe (2003) esp. 17–24 on the desert crossing itself.

126 For comparison, Seland (2015b) 48 calculates the journey from Dura Europus to Palmyra as 7–8 days with Damascus being a further 7 days travel from Palmyra.

127 Strabo 16.1.27 and Xen. *Anab.* 1.5.9.

128 Young (2011) 22.

describing a single route down the Euphrates and makes no mention of intersecting, diverging, or converging routes at any point, including those points such as in Osrhoene, where we know such intersections existed. For his part, Strabo is very selective about his material and mentions only a handful of the cities and routes that existed in his time and the Hellenistic period from which his sources derive. Whatever the status of Palmyra at the beginning of the first century CE, Strabo's silence on the matter reflects either Strabo's assessment of the city's importance or the complete absence of the city from his sources, rather than the absence of Palmyrene desert routes. Nevertheless, the evidence at our disposal does suggest that the use of the desert routes for trade coincides with the period of Palmyra's flourishing. Despite the partially Greco-Roman character of the city in the second and third centuries, Palmyrene epigraphy shows only Palmyrene merchants using these desert routes.¹²⁹ The fall of Palmyra in the third century CE seems to spell the end for the desert routes the city controlled.¹³⁰ Young's argument that the Palmyrenes created these trade routes across the northern Syrian desert is the most likely hypothesis. Seland suggests that the political fragmentation of the Euphrates route (and the attended plethora of tolls and taxes of which Strabo complains) opened an opportunity for Palmyrene merchants to create a competing route across the desert – a route more reliant on local guides, but perhaps holding a more consistent level of risk and fewer tax agents to deal with.¹³¹ Palmyrene trade flourished between the first and mid-late third centuries CE; besides Pliny, our only geographical source for Palmyra during that period is Claudius Ptolemy.

Although Ptolemy does not discuss Palmyrene trade routes directly, comparing his work to the near-contemporary Palmyrene Tax Law allows some insight into local networks of exchange. Ptolemy's *Geography* is concerned with locating sites in a geometric space, but it also suggests regional groupings. As we have seen, Ptolemy makes Palmyra the major city of a broad region within Syria called Palmyrenê, which stretched to the Euphrates and encompassed sixteen other cities, including three on the Euphrates and thirteen in the interior. Ptolemy's Palmyrenê is more populated than Pliny's presentation of the region, but is still sparsely settled by comparison to the rest of Ptolemy's Syria or Mesopotamia. Palmyra acted as a regional administrative centre for a large area, but the extent of that area is uncertain. In 137 CE, the *boule* of

129 Young (2011) 138.

130 Gawlikowski (1983) 68. Post-Palmyrene trade probably simply switched to one of the alternative routes: across northern Mesopotamia, along the Euphrates or around Arabia through the Indian Ocean; Young (2011) 182–83.

131 Seland (2014a) 85–86; Seland (2015b) 45–46.

Palmyra passed a law regulating tax collection for many goods and services and published it in Greek and Palmyrene Aramaic in the city's *agora*.¹³² For many years this was used as evidence for the taxation of long distance trade passing through Palmyra, but more recently it has been shown to refer to taxes collected on goods sold in Palmyra for local consumption.¹³³ The area within which this law applied is difficult to determine. The decree enacting the law says only that the law should be displayed in the *agora*; it makes no mention of duplicate texts to be displayed elsewhere. However, the text of the tax law itself specifies that it applied beyond the city proper. The first line makes a distinction between importing slaves into Palmyra (εἰς Πάλμυρα) and importing them into the borders of Palmyra (εἰς τὰ ὅρια Παλμυρηνῶν),¹³⁴ revealing that the city and its territory were separate zones conceptually and legally. Moreover, it implies that trade could occur in locations outside the city of Palmyra itself and that the tax would still apply in those locations. The old law appended to the end of the inscription (by decree of the *boule*) also refers to the territory of Palmyra for the purposes of regulating grazing and exempts those who convey provisions into or out of the *chora* from a certain tax.¹³⁵ As such, it governs not just Palmyra, but the surrounding area, perhaps including much of Ptolemy's Palmyrenê. Inscribed boundary markers establish that Palmyrene territory extended southwest for 60 miles in the direction of Damascus and northwest 75 miles in the direction of Apamea.¹³⁶ The marker to the southwest indicates that the adjacent territory was that of Emesa, while that to the northwest was "a]rva civitat[is / Apam]enorum" or "Hemes]enorum", probably the former

¹³² Palmyrene text: PAT 0259. Greek text: OGIS vol. 2, no. 629. The publication history of the text can be found in Matthews (1984) 157–58. The Palmyrene Tax Law is a rich and detailed document, much of which falls beyond the scope of my project. Of interest here are the implications of the text for the territorial extent of Palmyra, and the implications of the document for long-distance commercial movement.

¹³³ Teixidor (1984); Matthews (1984); Smith (2013) 69–73.

¹³⁴ Gaps in the Greek text are often able to be filled because of the text's formulaic language and the survival of the Palmyrene version of the text.

¹³⁵ The decree of the *boule*: decree, lines 11–12. Grazing: "εἰς Παλμυρηνήν" (text, lines 233–237). Importation of provisions: "Τοὺς δὲ εἰς χωρία ἢ ἀπο τῶν [χω]ρίων κατακομίζοντας ἀτέλεις εἶναι, ὥς καὶ συνεφώνησεν αὐτοῖς." (text, lines 189–191). This movement of provisions into and out of the *chora* was presumably with reference to the city itself, recalling the dichotomy between city and territory established in the opening clause of the law itself. It is possible, but unlikely, that it refers to the exchange of goods between the *chora* and the neighbouring regions.

¹³⁶ Matthews (1984) 162. Matthews interprets the lack of boundary markers found in other directions (particularly the east) as meaning that Palmyrene control was based on focal points (water points and their associated settlements) than on territory, Matthews (1984) 163–64.

(Apamea) on the grounds of the space available for the letter forms.¹³⁷ If the territory of Palmyra extended as far as the territory of Emesa and probably Apamea, then some of the cities which Ptolemy included in Palmyrenê should be located within the borders of Palmyra (εἰς τὰ ὄρια Παλμυρηνῶν) and thus within the purview of the Palmyrene Tax Law.¹³⁸ Ptolemy's Palmyrenê may just be a convenient regional grouping, but the Tax Law suggests that there is a degree to which it might correspond with a Roman-era administrative area.

The tax law acted within the hinterland of Palmyra to protect local producers. The decree of the *boule* makes clear that it aimed at reducing disputes between merchants and tax collectors, and it did so by setting taxation levels for a variety of goods.¹³⁹ Notably, most of its extant clauses concern the conveyance of goods over the borders of Palmyrene territory, that is, imported and exported goods.¹⁴⁰ These goods are predominantly staples unlikely to have been worth the trouble of transporting across the border: dried produce, olive oil, animal fat, and salt fish. Other goods could have been the objects of long-distance trade, but were part of the requirements of a Greco-Roman city and may have found a local terminus: slaves, purple-died fleece, and unguents. The remains of the surrounding villages and their attendant agricultural infrastructure indicate that Palmyra's hinterland was fertile; the surpluses which local farms produced were not subject to these taxes if they were sold within the borders of Palmyra's territory.¹⁴¹ Thus, the law hindered external trade by increasing its costs and lowering the potential profit. It would not have prevented merchants from importing and exporting goods when the opportunity for profit arose, but it would have acted to strengthen internal networks of exchange.

The movement of bulky, low-value items was not usually an attractive prospect, but these exchanges did take place across territorial borders such as those of Palmyra. One line of exchange was between Palmyra and the fertile regions along the Euphrates controlled by Dura Europus. Palmyra's position in a desert, combined with a growing urban population, particularly an unproductive population concerned with long-distance trade, probably meant that the city relied on imported staples from neighbouring agricultural zones.¹⁴² Water scarcity may have driven up the cost of water and in turn increased the

¹³⁷ Matthews (1984) 162.

¹³⁸ Ptol. *Geog.* 5.15.24.

¹³⁹ Matthews (1984) 174.

¹⁴⁰ Lines 1–53 (Matthews (1984) 175–77).

¹⁴¹ Matthews (1984) 162.

¹⁴² Dirven (1996) 41–42. Dirven claims that the tax was halved from the old law of 67–69 CE to the law of 137 CE, but it remained constant at 1 denarius: Greek text, lines 187–91 and 89–91.

price of locally grown Palmyrene produce, making profitable the importation of otherwise unprofitable goods.¹⁴³ Dirven has suggested that caravans carried trade goods to Dura to be loaded onto ships for the journey downstream and subsequently returned to Palmyra laden with Durene produce for Palmyrene consumption.¹⁴⁴

Materially and legally, the Palmyrene Tax Law demonstrates a concern for local social and commercial networks. The display context of the inscription shows the *boule's* concern for local affairs. In the legal proceeding that authorised the inscription, the Greek text stands before the Palmyrene, but the main body of the law places the two languages on an even footing by making use of the orthographic peculiarities of the two languages.¹⁴⁵ The two versions begin at the same place, the top centre of the stone, then move out from that point according to the conventions of their respective languages: the Palmyrene version proceeds from the centre to the left and the Greek version proceeds from the centre to the right.¹⁴⁶

Both the Tax Law and Ptolemy's aggregation imply a kind of local unity, but how much that corresponded to any sort of commercial or administrative reality is another matter. Although it does not address long-distance trade, the Palmyrene Tax Law shows the interaction between the local concerns of Palmyra's city government and wider issues of commercial movement on a regional scale. Internally, the region that Ptolemy identifies as Palmyrenê (or at least the significant part of it that fell within the legal jurisdiction of Palmyra) comprised a network of local trade routes which were in turn connected to other small regional networks such as that of Dura Europus. Palmyra also participated in north-south routes within the Roman Near East.

6 North-South Routes

The geographical descriptions of the Mesopotamian Borderland devote little attention to routes running from north to south or vice versa. One reason for this is geophysical. The Fertile Crescent is so named because it forms a roughly crescent-shaped curve above the Syrian desert. In the imperial period, Rome controlled the western part of the curve and Iranian empires controlled the

143 A hint of this may be found in the Tax Law's concern to regulate water, Smith (2013) 70–72. On the water resources of Palmyra, see Seland (2015a) 116–17.

144 Dirven (1996) 46.

145 Photographs and drawing in *CIS* 2.3 no. 3913 cf *Tabulae* IVa, b.

146 Matthews (1984) 174.

eastern part. The Mesopotamian Borderland formed the central or upper part of the crescent and was primarily oriented along an east-west axis, minimising the utility of north-south routes. These routes primarily occurred in Roman Syria and Iranian Babylonia and Adiabene. A north-south route ran south from Nisibis through Singara to Hatra and southern Mesopotamia.¹⁴⁷ Those on the Roman side were represented obscurely in Roman geographic works. Initially, most such routes were closer to the Syrian coast, but as Roman control over the Near East solidified, a set of inland routes began to develop and thrive.¹⁴⁸ In book 5 of his *Natural History*, Pliny's narrative order reflects a section of a set of parallel and intersecting north-south communications routes. His narrative follows an itinerary proceeding up the coast of Syria, inland from Antioch, then down the Euphrates until that river turns east. There, Pliny's narrative leaves the river for a time, crossing the desert to Palmyra and other desert cities, before returning to the Euphrates and continuing to the marshes south of Seleucia and Babylon. To the north, this inland set of routes intersected with the northern Mesopotamian route in Commagene or at Harran/Carrhae, passed through the Taurus near Melitene, and continued to the Black Sea or Western Anatolia. To the south, they passed through the desert ports and followed the Nabatean trade routes south to Arabia Felix.¹⁴⁹

Most of the evidence for these routes comes from the archaeological record. Remote sensing from the region of Carrhae has revealed lines of movement

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- 147 Singara was inhabited as Māt Singara under the Assyrian Empire and lay on an important pair of routes, the north-south route between Nisibis and Hatra and the east-west route across northern Mesopotamia between the Tigris and the Khabur. Nissen, 'Singara' *BNP*; finds from numerous small sites along those southern slopes are briefly surveyed in Lloyd (1938). Singara was refounded by Septimius Severus as *Colonia Aurelia Septima Singara* and served as garrison site for two legions: Kennedy and Riley (1990) 125–30; Millar (1990) 39–40; Oates (1968) 103–6; Ball (2000); Nissen, 'Singara' *BNP*. Dio 68.22.2 (Trajan) and 55.24.4 (Septimius Severus); Amm. Marc. 20.6.8–9; Boeft et al. (1987) 148–51. The surviving fortifications date to the fourth century, but may represent late-Roman additions to a pre-Roman wall layout, Oates (1968) 103–6; Kennedy and Riley (1990) 125–30; Ball (2000) 170.
- 148 Strabo's description of Syria includes several fragments of the coastal route, perhaps reflecting a marine voyage rather than a land route, but mentions no inland routes north of the Nabataean kingdom: Strabo 16.2.8–9 (Antioch to Laodiceia); 16.2.12 (Laodiceia to Aradus); 16.2.15 (Orthosia and the Eleutherus River to Tripolis); 16.2.16 (navigation on the Lycus and Jordan Rivers); 16.2.19 (Byblus to Berytus); 16.2.22 (Berytus to Tyre); 16.2.24–25 (Tyre to Acê); 16.2.27–28 (Acê to Pelusium). Strabo (16.4.19) also mentions a trade in aromatics sourced from the Sabaeans in Arabia which extended "as far as Syria and Mesopotamia" (μέχρι Συρίας καὶ Μεσσοποταμίας), but provides no details.
- 149 This north-south line is part of the structure that Jones imagined when he described Syria as two lines of port cities: one facing the Mediterranean, the other facing the Syrian desert, (1971) 227.

along the Balikh between Anatolia and the desert cities of southern Syria.¹⁵⁰ A Roman road existed between Sura and Palmyra in the first century CE.¹⁵¹ This must have connected to other Roman roads, perhaps an earlier version of the Antonine and Severan roads between Palmyra and Epiphaneia (modern Hama).¹⁵² Other routes, not officially constructed or maintained by Roman authorities, connected the cities of Syria as well, in particular the Palmyrene and Nabataean caravan paths through the arid fringes of the Syrian desert. Evidence of Palmyrene merchants active in Egypt suggests that members of that metropolis and her diaspora communities used these north-south routes for commercial advantage.¹⁵³ In the second century, the southern extension of these routes was organised and policed by Roman forces following Trajan's annexation of Arabia.¹⁵⁴ The series of roads and stations which Roman administrators built in Syria, beginning with the *Via Nova Traiana* but most notably the *Strata Diocletiana*, have often been interpreted as a defensive arrangement against increasingly hostile desert raiders.¹⁵⁵ However, the idea that such roads were part of a Roman "grand strategy" of frontier defence was overturned by the work of scholars like Benjamin Isaac who stresses that the primary role of the Roman army on the edge of the Syrian desert was preventing and suppressing internal unrest including banditry.¹⁵⁶ Roman maintenance of north-south routes at the edge of the empire facilitated the movement of public citizens in support of provincial administration and military activities and of private parties in support of local, regional, and long-distance trade and movement. Official support of commercial movement for the benefit of private entrepreneurs was not so much a public service as an administrative manoeuvre to smoothen the exploitation of that trade and movement as a source of tax revenue.¹⁵⁷

150 A well-defined hollow way runs parallel with the Balikh, Wilkinson (1995) 152f. with fig. 9. The route south from the Balikh to Nikephorion could also be taken by people moving between Zeugma and the Euphrates route, for example, Amm. Marc. 23.3.1.

151 *AE* (1933), no. 205; Sartre (2005) 65.

152 Sartre (2005) 141–42.

153 Palmyrene merchants at Coptos and Berenike probably used their family connections to Palmyra to their advantage in the north-south trade between Egypt, Nabataea/Arabia, Palmyra, and the rest of Syria: Casson (1989) 20; Tomber (2008) 80; Smith (2013) 161–62.

154 Young (2011) 128–34.

155 *Via Nova Traiana*: Sartre (2005) 139–40. *Strata Diocletiana*: Whittaker (1994) 135–39; Isaac (1990) 163–71; Parker (1991).

156 Isaac (1990) esp. 156–160 and 213–218; Whittaker (1994) 136–39. For the earlier view, Luttwak (1984).

157 For the public and private benefits of Trajan's works programs in Egypt, see Young (2011) 77–78.

A second reason for the low priority of north-south routes in our geographical sources can be found in the nature and chronological distribution of our geographical sources. The development of these routes seems to have begun under the Flavians and peaked under Trajan and Diocletian. This increasing Roman concern with control of space can be seen in Pliny's *Natural History*, but the style of his work is more concerned with displaying Roman power through enumeration of controlled point features rather than showing the networks of movement which connected that empire. The narrative structure of his description of Syria is one of the few hints of north-south movement in our sources. Ptolemy's account reflects the Roman world of Trajan, but that work is concerned with movement to an even lesser degree than Pliny's. Thereafter, there is a lacuna in our geographical information for the third century. In the fourth century, Roman itineraries show the existence of the route sections which allow inter-regional movement throughout Syria, but the extant books of Ammianus do not address the region. It is to those itineraries that we now turn.

7 Local Routes

Travel to unfamiliar places in the Roman world was facilitated by *itineraria*, written lists of places (such as cities, villages, waystations and other landmarks) through which a traveller would pass to get from point to point.¹⁵⁸ Several itineraries survive in various degrees of preservation, two of which include parts of the Mesopotamian Borderland: the *Itinerarium Antonini* (or *Antonine Itinerary*), which is entirely textual, and the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (*Peutinger Table*), which is a graphic representation of a textual itinerary.¹⁵⁹ Dilke links the creation of the *Itinerary* to imperial journeys based rather weakly on the received name, but it seems to have been compiled from a series of smaller itineraries of different lengths and styles.¹⁶⁰ The exclusion of areas of the Dacian frontier abandoned in 270 CE and the consistent use of "Byzantium" rather than Constantinople dates the *Antonine Itinerary* to the late third

¹⁵⁸ Brodersen (2001); Salway (2001).

¹⁵⁹ For the *Tabula Peutingeriana* as a *itinerarium pictum*, an illustrated itinerary, see Brodersen (2001) 18; Salway (2001) 30–31. Talbert argues that it was designed as a display object with a commemorative or propagandistic purpose, Talbert (2010) 142–57.

¹⁶⁰ Dilke (1987) 235–36; Salway (2001) 39–43. It has been suggested that the *Itinerary* derived from official records of imperial or military travel. This may be the case, but as Salway has argued, its construction suggests a significant amount of revision and modification of any such administrative material. Salway concludes that the *Itinerary* was composed using publicly displayed route lists, (2001) 58–59.

century.¹⁶¹ For its part, the *Peutinger Table* is much debated in the scholarship of ancient cartography. The extant version was made in the thirteenth century but seems to have been based on an imperial map revised several times, including an important revision around 300 CE.¹⁶² As a map, it uses the familiar modern orientation with north at the top, but the north-south scale is vastly compressed to accommodate the dimensions of the scroll on which it was depicted. Because the probable audience of these itineraries were travellers unfamiliar with the regions they describe, they provide a useful record of the routes that such travellers would expect to pass along, and more importantly for our purposes, construct a vision of the region as seen from afar.¹⁶³

The *Antonine Itinerary* comprises a large number of discrete sections, each of which describes a single itinerary. Each of these itineraries notes the start and end points, followed by the total distance, then lists the individual stages of the journey, each followed by the appropriate distance. Several of the itineraries enter the Mesopotamian Borderland:

[184]	A Germanicia per Dolicum et Zeuma Aedissam usque	m.p.LXXXVII:
	Sicos Basilisses	m.p.XX
	Dolica	m.p.X
[185]	Zeuma	m.p.XII
	Bemmaris	m.p.XX
	Edissa	m.p.XXV.
[186]	Item a Germanicia per Samosatam Edissam	m.p.XC:
	In Catabana	m.p.XV
	Nisus	m.p.XVI
	Tharse	m.p.XIII
	Samosata leg. VII	m.p.XIII
[187]	Edissa	m.p.XII.
	(...)	
[188.4]	Item ab Arbalisso Muzana	m.p.XLVIII:
	In Medio	m.p.XXII
	Muzana	m.p.XXVI.

¹⁶¹ 280–90 CE, Dilke (1985) 236; Salway (2001) 39–40. The text can be found in Cuntz (1929).

¹⁶² Talbert argues that the map reflects a Diocletianic worldview: Talbert (2010) 133–36. The older view was for a fourth century date: Dilke (1987) 238. On the eclectic collection of toponyms contained in the *Table*, see also Brodersen (2001) 18. There is much debate over the status of the *Peutinger Table*, against Dilke's rather uncomplicated view of the *Table* as a map in the modern sense, see Brodersen (2001); Talbert (2010).

¹⁶³ Salway suggests that the intended users of published itineraries would have been travellers on personal or civic business, Salway (2001) 59–60.

(cont.)

	Item a Germanicia Edissa		m.p.LXXXIIII:
	Sico Basilisses	m.p.xv	
[189]	Dolica	m.p.xv	
	Zeuma	m.p.XIIII	
	Cannaba	m.p.XIII	
	In Medio	m.p.XII	
	Aedissa	m.p.xv.	
	Item a Cyro Edissa		m.p.XCII:
	Ciliza sive Urmagiganti	m.p.XII	
[190]	Abarara	m.p.x	
	Zeugma	m.p.XXII	
	Bemmari Canna	m.p.XL	
	Bathenas Meri	m.p.VIII	
	Aedissa	m.p.x.	
	Item a Nicopoli Edissa		m.p.CXXXVII:
	Aliaria	m.p.XIII	
	Gerbedisso	m.p.xv	
[191]	Dolicha	m.p.xx	
	Zeuma	m.p.XXIIII	
	Canaba	m.p.XXV	
	In Medio	m.p.XXII	
	Aedissa	m.p.XVIII	
	Item a Callecoma Edissa		m.p.LXXXV:
	Bathnas	m.p.XXIIII	
	Hierapoli	m.p.XXI	
[192]	Thilaticomum	m.p.x	
	Bathanas	m.p.xv	
	Aedissa	m.p.xv.	
	Item a Carris Hierapoli		m.p.LXXXIIII:
	Bathnas	m.p.XXX	
	Thilaticomum	m.p.XXII	
[193]	Hierapoli	m.p.XXXI. ¹⁶⁴	

¹⁶⁴ *Itin. Ant. Aug.* 184–187.1; 188.4–193.1. Some of these sites are shown on Map 6.2, often with distorted names. For example, Bathnas is Batnae/Anthemusia; Dolicum, Dolica and Dolicha are Doliche; Edissa(m) and Aedissa(m) are Edessa; Zeuma is Zeugma.

The *Antonine Itinerary* gives a sense of the most important sites and routes of the period. Moreover, by describing each route by its start and end points before listing the sites on the routes, it establishes a hierarchy of those sites and routes: most important are original and terminal points, then notable waypoints used to distinguish routes that start and end in the same places from each other, then the points through which the route passes.¹⁶⁵ Presumably there remain some places that were not even important enough to be recorded in these lists.

The hierarchy constructed in the *Antonine Itinerary* is generally as we would expect for the portion of Mesopotamia it covers. As the origin or terminus of all but one of these routes, the itinerary represents Edessa as the most important city in Mesopotamia. Germanica in Commagene and Emesa; Cyrrhus, Hierapolis, Nicopolis and Callicoma in Syria; and Carrhae in Mesopotamia also feature as origins or termini, while Doliche, Zeugma and Samosata all rate mention as notable waypoints to distinguish between similar routes (“a Germanicia per Dolicum et Zeuma Aedissam” and “a Germanicia per Samosatam Edissam” for example).¹⁶⁶ Three crossing points over the Euphrates are mentioned: Zeugma, Samosata and Thilaticomus; the latter lay near Hierapolis and was crossed between that city and Edessa and Carrhae.¹⁶⁷ More remarkable than any of the specific sites mentioned is that the *Antonine Itinerary* ignores the Roman province of Mesopotamia established by Septimius Severus and places Edessa at the edge of the empire. There is no evidence that the Sasanian attacks in the third century resulted in anything but a temporary loss of Nisibis or the province of Mesopotamia. If the *Itinerary* has a Diocletianic date, then the omission of Nisibis as a route hub (and possibly Singara and Amida as well) represents a deliberate choice to represent Edessa as the eastern limit of the text’s geographical coverage. In his monograph on Edessa, Ross suggests that the *Antonine Itinerary* reflects the empire at the time of Caracalla who visited the region in 217 CE.¹⁶⁸ However, this date would still post-date Septimius Severus’ establishment of his *provincia Mesopotamia* and require that the *Itinerary*’s compiler had deliberately omitted Roman centres east of Edessa. Attempts to date the *Itinerary* based on the omission of these eastern regions conflicts with attempts to date them by the omission of Dacia; as a whole, the

165 The hierarchies established through the organisation of these networks can be seen in other geographical works, although they are seldom as clear and multi-layered but must be inferred from the terminology used to describe the spaces included, as well as by simple inclusion or exclusion.

166 *Itin. Ant. Aug.* 184.1; 186.1.

167 *Itin. Ant. Aug.* 192.1; 192.6.

168 Ross (2001) 17.

Antonine Itinerary depicts a set of boundaries which never existed. Salway argues that the *Itinerary* was assembled from publicly displayed route data (*tabellaria*) gathered from throughout the empire.¹⁶⁹ Thus, it is possible that the routes near Dacia reflect a late third-century disposition while the routes around Edessa reflect the region's pre-Severan boundaries. However, despite the selective representation of Mesopotamia at the edge of the Roman world, the importance of movement in Roman Mesopotamia overall is reinforced by the ample connections between Edessa and the neighbouring networks. Edessa's connections are so profuse that Salway characterises the cluster as "needless repetition", perhaps overlooking the central importance of that site.¹⁷⁰

The coverage of the *Peutinger Table* extends much further east, far beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire to Taprobane (Sri Lanka) and the mouth of the Ganges.¹⁷¹ While the *Table* is sometimes described as a map, it is accurate only as a set of itineraries.¹⁷² In the Mesopotamian Borderland, Hierapolis, Zeugma, Samosata and Edessa all appear, as well as other Roman cities further east: Rhesaina, Nisibis, Singara and Tigranocerta. The nature of the *Table* distorts the topography, but while the above-mentioned cities are readily identifiable and topographically comprehensible, the course of the rivers and the placement of several other major cities are not. Babylon, Seleucia, Hatra and Ctesiphon are all marked. Using the placement of those cities and the rivers, it is possible to read the following cities as within the general region of Mesopotamia: Tharrama (on the Euphrates, downstream of Zeugma), Tigubis (a short distance downstream from Tharrama), Thelser (near Hatra and the Tigris), Peloriarca (east of the Tigris, between Hatra and Ctesiphon), and Albanta (probably in Adiabene near the Zagros and connected to Thetsa and Peloriarea).¹⁷³ All of these cities are represented with the same apparent priority by means of the *Table's* standard twin-towered drawing of city walls.

The *Peutinger Table* presents Mesopotamia as an active region, with several urban hubs, and well connected with numerous routes; however, the organisation of this network is haphazard and does not represent the full reality of fourth century mobility in the region. Batnae and Carrhae appear on the route between Zeugma and Rhesaina; likely enough, except that Edessa is not connected to this route. Edessa is well connected within Mesopotamia, with

169 Salway (2001) 58–59.

170 Salway (2001) 28.

171 These lie on the 14th panel of the *Table*. The entire *Table* is published online at <http://peutinger.atlantides.org/map-a/>.

172 Brodersen (2001) 18.

173 The Mesopotamian section of the *Peutinger Table* has been examined by Dillemann (1962) 133–38, esp. fig. 12.

four routes radiating away to the south, but it is not connected to any of the other settlements on the southern side of the Tur Abdin (Rhesaina, Nisibis or Singara). The Tur Abdin is not marked on the map, but the *Table* does separate the cities to the north and south of those hills. The only connections between the cities of the Upper Tigris Basin and those of the Mesopotamian plain are by routes which follow the Euphrates and the Tigris. In his account of the Persian attacks on Mesopotamia, Ammianus specifically mentions several routes through and around the Tur Abdin, especially between Amida and Osrhoene.¹⁷⁴ These omissions mean that the *Peutinger Table* is best considered holistically. It presents Mesopotamia as an internally well-connected region and emphasises the northern routes and those routes down the great rivers. Moreover, both by its material form and the connections it shows, it draws attention to east-west movement between Syria and Babylonia at the expense of north-south movement between Mesopotamia and Armenia, and even segregates the Upper Tigris Basin as a visually distinct zone. In terms of physical size, number of cities, number of connections, and interconnectivity with the rest of the world, the map minimises the place of Sasanian Babylonia and emphasises Roman Mesopotamia. Babylon and Seleucia on the Tigris are squeezed out, almost into a peninsula, widely separated from Ctesiphon, which in turn appears in a cul-de-sac, a single connection linking it to Peloriarca. This should not be simply written off as ignorance of Babylonia; Sasanian Ekbatana is a well-connected city which acts as a hub for the Persian Empire. Rather, this reflects a deliberate minimisation of several politically important Sasanian centres and an elevation of that centre through which Roman land trade with the people and places further east passed.

The itineraries construct a landscape of interconnected local networks centred on places of contact. While other types of geographical source may provide less detailed information about the networks themselves, they show important places of contact. Several have been mentioned already: Skenai at the Babylonian end of Strabo's Euphrates route, the annual fair at Anthemusia, and Palmyra.¹⁷⁵ Because our sources are selective in their inclusion of sites, we are shown the places they considered most important to relate. Thus, the degree of selectivity of each source might reveal something of their conception of such networks. However, because the reasons for inclusion vary even within a single text, this is difficult. Strabo, for example, one of the most selective

174 Several can be seen in Ammianus' first-hand account of the movements of both sides during the Persian invasion of Mesopotamia in 359 CE: Amm. Marc. 18.6.8–18.8.

175 Anthemusia: Amm. Marc. 14.3.3. Opis: Strabo 16.1.9. Skenai: Strabo 16.1.27. Ctesiphon: Strabo 16.1.16.

sources for Mesopotamian sites, includes Thapsacus and Zeugma because of their importance as reference points for long distance measurements and as important current and past crossings of the Euphrates and Sinnaca because it was the site of Crassus' defeat. Tigranocerta, Nisibis and Carrhae were all important centres, but exactly why Strabo chose to include them is unclear; most likely it was a combination of political, administrative, commercial and demographic reasons. The *Expositio* is clear: whatever other qualities they may possess, Nisibis and Amida were mercantile centres. The relationship between these cities and the major commercial routes through Mesopotamia is circular. Such routes visit important cities and cities become important because of their position on routes.

8 Representing Mesopotamian Trade

The imperial geographic writers seldom provide a detailed analysis of the trading activities which appear in their geographical narratives. In her analysis of trade connections between Rome and India, Tomber describes a set of six questions which can be asked of a trade network.¹⁷⁶ What goods were exchanged and what others travelled alongside? Who controlled the trade? Who conducted the trade? Where did the traders live? What routes were followed and how do artefacts inform on these routes? What was the duration and extent of trade through time? The geographic writers of the Roman Empire provide us with very little information with which to answer these questions. We can establish something of the routes along which trade was conducted through Mesopotamia. Some authors give hints as to the likely goods that were traded.¹⁷⁷ Sometimes places are singled out as sites of trade – Palmyra, Anthemusia, Opis on the Tigris, Skenai, Ctesiphon – but the people conducting the trade are largely invisible. The kind of specific information about trade routes that Tomber's questions seek were not important to the geographic writers, but the fact that trade took place was.

The main trade route between the Roman Empire and the people and places to the east seems to have been through the Indian Ocean, by way of either the Red Sea ports of Egypt (and Arabia to a lesser degree) or the desert routes of Palmyra and the Persian Gulf, but other routes through Mesopotamia

¹⁷⁶ Tomber (2008) 17.

¹⁷⁷ Strabo's description of boats built in Syria and shipped down the Euphrates (16.1.11) suggests the value of timber in Babylonia. He describes the resources of Babylonia (16.1.14) and Gordyene (16.1.24), some of which were probably traded.

existed and were emphasised by the geographical writers in their accounts of the Mesopotamian Borderland. Strabo shows Mesopotamia as a transitory space through which merchants move between Roman Syria and Parthian Babylonia without interacting with the most significant populated areas of the region. Pliny emphasises Palmyra's role as a borderland city astride a network of long-distance caravan routes. Ptolemy's account is static, but by comparing his catalogue and the Palmyrene Tax Law, we see that Palmyra provides an example of interaction between the long distance routes most clearly described by the geographical writers and the local routes which we can see implicitly in their texts. The *Expositio Totius Mundi* is concerned with the commercial links between Mesopotamia and Osrhoena and the surrounding provinces and nations. While the method and the precise geographical focus of the narratives change through time and text, the general concern with commercial movement remains throughout the Roman descriptions of the Mesopotamian Borderland. Also remaining consistent is the general disregard for local routes and intra-Imperial routes between adjacent provinces and regions. These are seldom treated in detail by the geographical writers. Rather, they focus their attention on constructing the Mesopotamian Borderland as a space of inter-imperial movement, connections and commerce.

Ruling

As Rome expanded into the Near East, her power was checked by the Iranian empire of the Arsacid dynasty, known to Greek and Roman sources as the Parthians. In the territory of the former Seleucid Empire, one of the major Hellenistic kingdoms founded by Alexander's successors, Roman and Parthian territory alike lay atop a deep base of previous Near Eastern imperial histories. By the first century CE, the western edge of the Mesopotamian Borderland was administered, directly or indirectly, by the Roman governor of Syria; the eastern edge was under the political control of the Parthians, often indirectly. This inter-imperial borderland forced Roman writers to negotiate an ideology of Roman power that acknowledged no limit (*imperium sine fine*)¹ in the face of a real foreign power that successfully resisted the Roman advance. This chapter examines how the geographical writers of the Roman Empire represented those overlapping historical and contemporary imperial histories in their works and how they described and distinguished the two facing areas of imperial control. The chapter begins by considering the treatment of Roman power in four important borderland spaces: Commagene, Osroene, Nisibis and Palmyra. I then show how Strabo appealed to both Roman political ideology and Hellenistic intellectual authority in his representation of the Mesopotamian Borderland during the Principate through his use of the historical legacy of Alexander the Great and the Macedonian colonies of the Seleucid Empire, as well as a partial treatment of contemporary political circumstances to negotiate the relationship between Roman and Parthian power in the borderland. Finally, the chapter concludes by placing these strategies in the context of later Roman geographies, generally, and other writers on the Mesopotamian Borderland, specifically.

1 Roman Power in the Borderland

Chapter 1 introduced the Mesopotamian Borderland by showing the first four centuries of its history through the lens of the kingdoms within it. The first section of this chapter examines four of the key sites of that narrative through their treatment by the Roman imperial geographical writers. Commagene and

¹ Vir. *Aen.* 1.279.

Osrhoene were major zones of confrontation and interaction between the Roman and Parthian worlds in the first century CE. Their position on the frontier of Roman power contributes to their relative importance in our earliest geographical sources, Strabo and Pliny. Nisibis appears in less detail in those early works, but is one of the few cities to appear as a consistently important site in the Mesopotamian Borderland. It was distant from the symbolic border in the first century CE but increasingly involved in Roman expansion in the second and third. By the fourth century, it was the focus on inter-imperial policy and diplomacy. Here I examine Nisibis as reflected in the fourth century sources. Finally, I turn to Palmyra to discuss its political position in relation to Roman power. The representation of borderland kingdoms (Commagene and Osrhoene) and cities (Palmyra and Nisibis) and their relation to the imperial powers in these geographical works illustrate how geographical texts undercut and problematise relationships of political allegiance and demonstrates the ambiguity in political relationships that permeates narratives of the border region.

1.1 *Commagene*

How was Commagene presented in Strabo's text?² His description hints at Commagene's turbulent journey through the waves of Seleucid contraction and Roman expansion:

In particular, Commagene is small. It has a fortified city, Samosata, in which lay the royal palace, but now it is a province. A small, but very fertile land lies around. In this place is now a bridge over the Euphrates (or Zeugma on the Euphrates). Opposite this lies Seleucia, a fortress of Mesopotamia, added to the dominion of Commagene by Pompey, in

2 Strabo 16.2.2: Μέρη δ' αὐτῆς τίθεμεν ἀπὸ τῆς Κιλικίας ἀρξάμενοι καὶ τοῦ Ἀμανοῦ τὴν τε Κομμαγενὴν καὶ τὴν Σελευκίδα καλουμένην τῆς Συρίας, ἔπειτα τὴν κοιλὴν Συρίαν, τελευταίαν δ' ἐν μὲν τῇ παραλίᾳ τὴν Φοινίκην, ἐν δὲ τῇ μεσογαίᾳ τὴν Ἰουδαίαν. ἔνιοι δὲ τὴν Συρίαν ὅλην εἰς τε Κοιλοσύρους [καὶ Σύρους] καὶ Φοινίκας διελόντες τοῦτοις ἀναμεμῖχθαι φασὶ τέτταρα ἔθνη, Ἰουδαίους Ἰδουμαίους Γαζαίους Ἀζωπίους, γεωργικοὺς μὲν, ὡς τοὺς Σύρους καὶ Κοιλοσύρους, ἐμπορικοὺς δέ, ὡς τοὺς Φοινίκας. (We set down as parts of it – beginning at Cilicia and the Amanus – Commagene and the so-called Syrian Seleucis, and then Coele-Syria, and finally, Phoenicia on the coast and Judaea in the interior. Some divide the whole of Syria into the Coelo-Syrians, Syrians and Phoenecians, and they say that four other peoples are mixed up with them: the Judaeans, Idumaeans, Gazaians, and Azotians, some of whom (such as the Syrians and Coelo-Syrians) are farmers, and others (such as the Phoenicians) are merchants." Translation adapted from Roller (2014). Radt (2002) 8.285–286.

which Tigranes killed Selene, surnamed Cleopatra, who had been trapped there for some time when she was driven out of Syria.³

Strabo's project did not allow him to present a detailed picture of Commagenean political relations, yet this brief and selective presentation tells us much about his conception of Commagene's position as a borderland state. He notes the two most important sites of the area: the former royal capital, which is noted as such, and the crossing at Zeugma. Both were crossings of the Euphrates, critical for regional interactions between Syria and northern Mesopotamia, and astride routes of even greater long-range significance. Both of these crossings are fortified; Samosata is a fortified city (ἐρυμνὴν πόλιν) and Seleucia a fortress (φρούριον). Strabo's Commagene is small, very fertile, highly fortified and located on important routes. Strabo leaves the strategic importance of the kingdom implicit, but he gives the impression that it would be difficult to conquer. Strabo emphasises this difficulty with his description of Seleucia in which Cleopatra I Selene resisted Tigranes, the final destroyer of the Seleucid Empire, for some time (χρόνον τινά). It does not seem to have presented any difficulty to Roman power, here in the guise of Pompey. The addition of that fortress to the kingdom hints at the strategic importance of the kingdom. Pompey's motive could have been to strengthen the kingdom he had just conquered or to place the fortress in the hands of a strong ally. Either motive suggests a concern for the defence of the region. As does the annexation of the kingdom. Strabo presents a fortified area of implied strategic value, fertile and controlling important river crossings. The wealth and strategic importance of Commagene were two of the motives which emerged for Vespasian's eventual annexation of the kingdom. Strabo's narrative does not discuss any internal political divisions in the kingdom.⁴ Nor does he mention the recurring concern by Roman authorities for the loyalty of the Commagenean kings, who were accused of collaborating with Parthia whenever the kingdom was annexed or reduced in size, especially after the final annexation of 72 CE. Strabo presents the region as politically united and part of the Roman Empire.

3 Strabo 16.2.3: "καθ' ἑκάστα δὲ ἡ Κομμαγενὴ μικρά τις ἐστίν· ἔχει δ' ἐρυμνὴν πόλιν Σαμόσατα ἐν ᾗ τὸ βασιλείον ὑπῆρχε, νῦν δ' ἐπαρχία γέγονε· χώρα δὲ περικείται σφόδρα εὐδαίμων, ὀλίγη [δέ]. Ἐνταῦθα δὲ νῦν ἐστὶ τὸ ζεῦγμα τοῦ Εὐφράτου· κατὰ τοῦτο δὲ Σελεύκεια ἱδρύται φρούριον τῆς Μεσοποταμίας προσωρισμένοι ὑπὸ Πομπηίου τῷ Κομμαγενῶ, ἐν ᾧ τὴν Σελήνην ἐπικληθεῖσαν Κλεοπάτραν Τιγράνης ἀνείλε, καθείρξας χρόνον τινὰ ἡνίκα τῆς Συρίας ἐξέπεσεν." Radt (2002) 8.286–288.

4 For the narrative of Commagenean annexation and the internal politics that may have attended the events, see Chapter 1.

Pliny the Elder was a provincial official (probably procurator of Africa) when Vespasian's annexation of Commagene occurred.⁵ He would have been aware of the general circumstances, if not Vespasian's deliberations, when he wrote his geographical narrative of Syria. However, his description of Commagene is cursory and he does not mention the annexation.⁶ These factors are in keeping with Pliny's general project: presenting the world as a static object of Roman power. In his initial overview of Syria, he lists Commagene among the places into which Syria used to be toponymically divided: "vocabatur ... Commagene".⁷ Pliny's use of the imperfect tense emphasises the past division of Syria by implicit contrast to the present unity of the area under Roman rule. Nevertheless, the term did not drop out of use with the annexation of the space; when his narrative journey around Syria reaches the Euphrates, Pliny uses "Commagene" to refer to the area as a sub-region of Syria.⁸ However, Pliny shows no interest in Commagene as a region. In his Euphrates itinerary, Commagene is a term of topological specification without political connotations. It forms part of his unified and ordered Syria.

1.2 *Osrhoene*

Pliny's description of Osrhoene does not mention these political and military manoeuvres, but it does illuminate the kingdom's critical and contested position in the inter-imperial borderland. Pliny's description of Syria in book 5 and his description of northern Mesopotamia in book 6 overlap in northwest Mesopotamia. Pliny first mentions Osrhoene (*Orroeon*) in book 5 as an Arabian region on the opposite side of the Euphrates from Commagene.⁹ Soon after he includes it in a list of areas in northern Mesopotamia (*Osrhoene, praefectura*

5 Syme (1969).

6 Pliny *NH* 5.85–86.

7 Pliny *NH* 5.66: "namque Palaestine vocabatur qua contingit Arabas, et Iudaea et Coele, dein Phoenice et qua recedit intus Damascena, ac magis etiamnum meridiana Babylonia, eadem Mesopotamia inter Euphraten et Tigrin quaque transit Taurum Sophene, citra vero eam Commagene et ultra Armeniam Adiabene, Assyria ante dicta, et ubi Ciliciam attingit Antiochia." (For it was called Palestine where it touches the Arabians, and Judaea and Coele, then Phoenicia and further inland, Damascena, and then even further, southern Babylonia. It is called Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, Sophene across the Taurus. Then, Commagene on this side of Sophene; Adiabene, previously called Assyria, on the other side of Armenia and Antiochia where it touches Cilicia.).

8 Pliny *NH* 5.85.

9 Pliny *NH* 5.85: "Arabiam inde laeva, Orroeon dictam regionem, trischoena mensura, dextraque Commagenen disternit, pontis tamen, etiam ubi Taurum expugnat, patiens." (By a distance of by three *schoinoi*, the Euphrates separates the region of Arabia called Osrhoene on the left and Commagene on the right, and allows a bridge, even where it smashes out of the Taurus.).

Mesopotamiae, and an Arab tribe called Praetavi), within it he names Edessa and Carrhae.¹⁰ In book 6, Osrhoene appears again as an ethnic group (*Orroei*), one of a list of Arab tribes (*Arabum gente*) in Mesopotamia.¹¹ The overlapping inclusion of Osrhoene in both books of Pliny's geography warrant a reconsideration of Pliny's narrative strategy of borderland representation.

We have seen how Pliny's descriptions of the Mesopotamian Borderland are constructed as lists. In book 5, these are a coastal *periplus* (5.75–80), two atopolgical (and alphabetical) lists in northern Syria (5.81–82), and the Euphrates itinerary (5.83–87, 89–90), the last interrupted by a list of desert ports (5.88–89). These lists follow a clear route up the Syrian coast, across northern Syria and down the Euphrates. Where the location of a list item is unclear, it is often possible to locate it in relation to neighbouring list items. The exception to this are the two alphabetical lists of people and places in northern Syria. While the lists in book 5 are arranged in a topologically coherent manner for the most part, those in book 6 are jumbled together without apparent structure. In book 6, the lists are the "Arab" tribes of Mesopotamia (6.117–18), the mountain tribes between Gordyene and the highlands of Adiabene (6.118), a list of unlocated towns (6.118), and the itinerary from Zeugma to Pompey's Roman border (6.119–20). Essentially, Pliny gives a list of subordinate lists. Within three of those lists, sites and people can be located relative to each other. In the fourth, the list of unlocated towns are linked by common Macedonian denomination rather than topological references. Because of this topological incoherence, the four lists are not able to be related to each other spatially based only on the internal evidence of the text; knowledge external to the text (such as personal knowledge or a map) is required.

10 Pliny NH 5.86: "Arabia supra dicta habet oppida Edessam, quae quondam Antiochia dicebatur, Callirhoem, a fonte nominatam, Carrhas, Crassi clade nobile. iungitur praefectura Mesopotamiae, ab Assyriis originem trahens, in qua Anthemusia et Nicephorium oppida. mox Arabes qui Praetavi vocantur; horum caput Singara." (Arabia, above mentioned, has the towns of Edessa, formerly called Antiochia; Callirhoë, named from its fountain, and Carrhae, famous for the defeat of Crassus. Adjoining to this is the praefecture of Mesopotamia, which derives its origin from the Assyrians, and in which are the towns of Anthemusia and Nicephorium. Next are the Arabians, called Praetavi whose capital is Singara.).

11 Pliny NH 6.117–18: "item in Arabum gente qui Orroei vocantur et Mandani Antiochiam quae a praefecto Mesopotamiae Nicanore condita Arabis vocatur. [118] Iunguntur his Arabes introrsus Eldamari, supra quos ad Pallacontam flumen Bura oppidum, Salmani et Masei Arabes." (And in Arabia, the people called the Orroei, and Antiochia of the Mardani, founded by Nicanor, the governor of Mesopotamia, and called Arabis. [118] Joined to these in the interior are the Eldamari Arabs (beyond whom is the town of Bura near the river Pallacontia) and the Salmani and Masei Arabs.).

Although Roman and Parthian space is never clearly delimited as such in the *Natural History*,¹² the division of the geographical narrative between two books strongly implies that the reader is to take the part described in book 5 as Roman space and the part described in book 6 as Parthian. In book 5, Syria appears after Egypt and before Cilicia in a circumlocution of the Roman Mediterranean; in book 6, Mesopotamia appears after the Iranian plateau (including an explicit, and brief, description of the Parthian Empire) and before Babylonian and Arabia. The different narrative structures of the two sections give the “Roman” part a greater sense of coherence and organisation than the “Parthian”. However, the lack of explicit notice of territorial divisions makes the presence of the division between Roman and Parthian space ambiguous.

The linear internal links in these lists, combined with the overall lack of links between these lists, give a general impression of disorder, although it is uncertain how many of Pliny’s readers would have possessed sufficient geographic knowledge of Mesopotamia to recognise these discontinuities. This disorder might only have been perceived by someone familiar with the space under discussion. Nevertheless, perceptive readers would still detect the alphabetical categorisation of Roman power evident in the north Syrian lists and the structure of nested lists in the Mesopotamian narrative, even if the spatial dislocation did not emphasise the disorder. This embedded linear representation of the world conforms to Pliny’s organisational principle of categorising and displaying the world under Roman power.¹³ In *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought*, Romm argues that catalogues of exotic wonders generate their own authority through a matter-of-fact tone, simple assertion of existence, and density of information.¹⁴ The rhetorical technique that Romm

12 The only place in the borderland clearly defined as Parthian is the *oppidum* of Philiscum on the Euphrates. Pliny, *NH* 5.89: “a Sura autem proxime est Philiscum, oppidum Parthorum ad Euphraten.”

13 Murphy (2004); Naas (2011); French (1994) 208–10. See Chapter 5.

14 Romm (1992) 91ff.: “... the matter-of-fact tone of the catalogue helps balance the exoticism of the wonders themselves: The insistence on spare linguistic structures such as the simple assertion of existence, “there is,” creates a veneer of clinical dispassionate inquiry. Furthermore, the frequent citation of sources which typifies this kind of writing also helps bolster authority – or at least relieves the author himself, and thereby his audience, of responsibility for assessing truth. Beyond these strategies, however, the very density of the catalogue plays a crucial role in its effectiveness, replicating at a stylistic level the density of the Indian landscape itself. The cataloguer of wonders typically crowds his data into linguistic aggregates rather than discrete units: prolix, hyperextended sentences, or rapid-fire series of clauses. The proliferation of data dislocates its readers and overwhelms their ability to separate true from false ...” For the relationship between imperialism and wonder catalogues in Pliny specifically, see Naas (2011).

describes applies to the *Natural History* broadly, but also applies to the kind of geographical narrative that Pliny presents here. That geographical narrative is full of long sentences, which, although grammatically simple, threaten to overwhelm the reader with lists of brief clauses and bare names. In Pliny's description, the list is less the medium of presentation than it is the message itself. Spatial relationships between provincial settlements are seldom important to Pliny. What is important is the relationship of dominance between the imperial centre and the many settlements which parade through the *Natural History*. A reader unfamiliar with the spatial realities of the Mesopotamian Borderland could be impressed with the coherence of a list of Roman subject cities and peoples in north Syria and still recognise the incoherent and shifting nature of the series of lists of peoples and places not subject to Roman organisation.

The repetition of the Orroei in both sections focuses the narrative division of imperial space on this borderland kingdom. This overlap places Osroene/the Orroei, Anthemus(ia) and Nikephorion (all in the western part of northern Mesopotamia) in both Roman and Parthian space.¹⁵ By doing so, Pliny figures the western part of the borderland between the Euphrates and the Balikh Rivers as a contested space which exists within the overlapping spheres of Roman and Parthian influence. The contrast is emphasised by the comparative order and disorder of the two worlds which laid claim to the space.

1.3 *Nisibis*

Nisibis appears infrequently but regularly in the historical record until the 3rd century when the expansion of the Roman frontier encompassed the city. The importance of the city within Mesopotamia is indicated by the frequency with which it appears in the geographical texts. This regional importance was no doubt the reason for its refoundation as Mygdonian Antioch by the Macedonians, a refounding which both Strabo and Pliny note. Ptolemy's omission of this alternate name may indicate that it had dropped out of use by the second century. However, Ptolemy prefers to use local names for sites and seldom records multiple names for a single site unless there is doubt about the name, so his silence on the Macedonian name of Nisibis is not informative. While we know that Nisibis was a major city of the second-century provinces of *Mesopotamia*, we have no good information on the bounds of those provinces. I use the plural "provinces" because we do not know if Roman administrators conceived of subsequent iterations of *Mesopotamia* as re-establishments of a previous province or as entirely new provinces with no link to the administrative history of the area.

¹⁵ Orroei: *NH* 5.85, 6.117. Anthemus(ia) and Nikephorion: *NH* 5.86; 6.118.

Our first geographical attestation of Nisibis after the establishment of those provinces is that of the *Expositio Totius Mundi*:

After this is our land; for Mesopotamia and Osrhene follow. Indeed, Mesopotamia has many diverse cities; I wish to speak of those which are outstanding. Namely, Nisibis and Amida, which have men who are the best men in all things, very acute in business, and good salesmen. The cities are especially wealthy and supplied with all goods: for they receive sellers from Persia into the whole Roman Empire and send back buyers. Except bronze and iron, since it is not permitted to give bronze or iron to foreigners. But those cities ever-standing by means of the forethought of the gods and the emperor, having famous walls, always destroy the courage of the Persians in war. Fervent in business and dealing well with every province. Then Edessa of Osdroenae, also a very splendid city.¹⁶

The celebration of the impregnability of the walls of Nisibis and Amida places the composition of the text before the destruction of Amida in 359/360 and the surrender of Nisibis to the Persians in 363.¹⁷ The *Expositio* represents the area of the Mesopotamian Borderland as divided between these two provinces, *Osrhoena* and *Mesopotamia*. Like many of our sources for the fourth century, it does not provide much detail on the boundaries of those administrative spaces. However, this text does mention Nisibis' role as a place of exchange between the two empires, perhaps its most famous role in a Roman context: "for they receive sellers from Persia into the whole Roman Empire and send back buyers" (*accipientes enim a Persis ipsi in omnem terram Romanorum vendentes et ementes iterum tradunt*).¹⁸ This was a legal status mandated by the treaty of 298 between Diocletian and Narsē. That treaty elevated Nisibis to a focal role in inter-imperial military, diplomatic and economic activity and the

16 *Expositio* 22: "Post hos nostra terra est. Sequitur enim Mesopotamia et Osdroena. Mesopotamia quidem habet civitates multas et varias, quarum excellentes sunt quas volo dicere. Sunt ergo Nisibis et <Amida>, quae in omnibus viros habent optimos et in negotio valde acutos et bene <vendentes>. Praecipue et divites et omnibus bonis ornati sunt: accipientes enim a Persis ipsi in omnem terram Romanorum vendentes et ementes iterum tradunt, extra aeramen et ferrum, quia non licet hostibus dare aeramen aut ferrum. Istae autem civitates semper stantes deorum et imperatoris sapientia, habentes moenia inclita, bello semper virtutem Persarum dissolvunt; ferventes negotiis et tranigentes cum omni provincia bene. Deinde Osdroenae Edessa et ipsa civitas splendida." For a discussion of the amendments *Amida* and *vendentes*, see Chapters 3 and 6 respectively.

17 On the image of an impregnable Nisibis, see also Amm. Marc. 25.9.8; Boeft et al. (2005) 297. In the first century BCE, Nisibis' strong walls caused Lucullus difficulties, Dio 36.6–7.

18 Peter the Patrician (fr. 13–14). Dignas and Winter (2007) 122–30.

borderland processes it produced were reflected in the geographical descriptions of the city.

Perhaps the most important clause of the treaty of 298 is the notice of the status of Nisibis as the point of commercial contact between Roman and Persian space. The exact ramifications of this attempt to control movement and commercial activity in the borderland by legal means are unclear. A summary of the treaty is transmitted to us by the sixth century Byzantine historian Peter the Patrician:

When Galerius and Diocletian met in Nisibis, they deliberated together and sent into Persia the archivist [ἀντιγραφέα τῆς μνήμης] Sicorius Probus as an ambassador ... These were the main points: that in the eastern region, the Romans should have Intelene with Sophene and Arzanene with Karduene and Zabdikene, that the Tigris River should be the boundary [ὁροθέσιον] between the two states, that the fortress Zintha which lies on the edge of Media should be the boundary with Armenia, that the king of Iberia should owe the tokens of his royal family to the Romans, and that the city of Nisibis which lies beside the Tigris should be the τόπον τῶν συναλλαγμάτων [place of συναλλαγμα; transactions or contracts]. When Narsē heard these terms (since his present fortunes did not allow him to refuse any of them) he agreed with all of them, except, so that he didn't seem forced to agree entirely, denied only that Nisibis should be the place of transactions/contracts. And Sicorius said "You must agree with this, for the embassy is not the emperor and nothing concerning this point has been entrusted to us by the emperor." So Narsē agreed with them ...¹⁹

The main points of the treaty relevant to this discussion are: the transfer of the Transtigritanian provinces to Roman control;²⁰ the declaration of the Tigris as

19 Petrus Patricus, fr. 14: "Ὅτι Γαλέριος καὶ Διοκλητιανὸς εἰς Νίσιβιν συνήλθον, ἔνθα κοινῇ βουλευσάμενοι στέλλουσιν εἰς Περσίδα πρεσβευτὴν Σικόριον Πρόβον ἀντιγραφέα τῆς μνήμης... ἦν δὲ τὰ κεφάλαια τῆς πρεσβείας ταῦτα, ὥστε κατὰ τὸ ἀνατολικὸν κλίμα τὴν Ἰντηληνὴν μετὰ Σοφηνῆς καὶ Ἀρζανηνὴν μετὰ Καρδουηνῶν καὶ Ζαβδικηνῆς Ῥωμαίους ἔχειν, καὶ τὸν Τίγριν ποταμὸν ἐκατέρας πολιτείας ὁροθέσιον εἶναι, Ἀρμενίαν δὲ Ζίνθα τὸ κάστρον ἐν μεθορίῳ τῆς Μηδικῆς κείμενον ὀρίζειν, τὸν δὲ Ἰβηρίας βασιλέα τῆς οἰκείας βασιλείας τὰ σύμβολα Ῥωμαίοις ὀφείλιν, εἶναι δὲ τόπον τῶν συναλλαγμάτων Νίσιβιν τὴν πόλιν παρακειμένην τῷ Τίγριδι. τούτων ὁ Ναρσαῖος ἀκούσας, ἐπειδὴ πρὸς μηδὲν τούτων ἡ παρούσα τύχη ἀρνεῖσθαι αὐτὸν συνεχώρει, συνέθετο τούτοις ἅπασι· πλὴν ἵνα μὴ δόξῃ ἀνάγκῃ πάντα ποιεῖν, διηρνήσατο μόνον τὸ τόπον εἶναι τῶν συναλλαγμάτων τὴν Νίσιβιν. ὁ δὲ Σικόριος· "ἐνδεδωκέναι χρὴ πρὸς τοῦτο. οὔτε γὰρ αὐτοκράτωρ ἡ πρεσβεία, καὶ περὶ τούτου ἐκ τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων οὐδὲν ἐπετέτραπτο." τούτων οὖν συντεθέντων..."

20 Ammianus (25.7.9) calls them the *regiones Transtigritanas*.

a boundary (ὁροθέσιον) between Roman and Persian space; and the requirement that Nisibis be the place where contacts are arranged and witnessed between the two empires (τόπον τῶν συναλλαγμάτων). It is notable that the only clause which Narsē attempted to reject (unsuccessfully) was that concerning Nisibis.

The treaty of 298 changed the legal status of Nisibis, but the exact nature of the change is not entirely clear. Petrus reports that Nisibis was to become the “place for transactions” (τόπον τῶν συναλλαγμάτων). This is usually taken to mean that Nisibis became the only site at which trade between Rome and Persia could occur. Dignas and Winter, for example, write of Nisibis becoming “a huge trans-shipment centre”.²¹ However, Lee notes several difficulties in taking this law as requiring all trade to pass through Nisibis.²² In particular, several fourth century sources note the trade wealth of other border cities. Ammianus mentions that Callinicum at the junction of the Euphrates and the Balikh was a city of rich trade (*commercandi opimitate*).²³ The *Expositio* uses plural verbal forms to describe the trading wealth and trade restrictions of Nisibis and Amida (*ornati sunt, accipientes, ementes, tradunt*). It is also possible that the plurality should apply beyond those two cities: Nisibis and Amida are outstanding (*excellentes*) among the cities of Mesopotamia.²⁴ Lee points out that if the treaty of 298 restricted all movement to Nisibis and the treaty of 363 (see below) retained the terms of the first treaty, then it is odd that an imperial edict of 408/9 allows trade at three locations (Nisibis, Callinicum, and Artaxata) while giving the aim as preventing spying, presumably by reducing the number of places at which spies could easily interact in a border context.²⁵ In the singular, a συναλλαγμα is a contract. This clause may have made Nisibis the place at which contracts for inter-imperial trade had to be registered rather than the place through which goods had to move. Whether Nisibis became a transshipment centre or a contract depository, two questions remain: Why Nisibis? And why Nisibis alone?

Restricting trade between the Roman and Persian Empires to only one site would have had several major effects and would have caused major difficulties, both for merchants and officials. Most importantly, it located the primary commercial site between the two empires in Roman territory. Channelling all cross-border trade through a single city would have made it easier for Roman

21 Dignas and Winter (2007) 197.

22 Lee (1993) 62–64.

23 Amm. Marc. 23.3.7; Boeft et al. (1998) 49.

24 Expositio 22: “Mesopotamia quidem habet civitates multas et varias, quarum excellentes sunt quas volo dicere.”

25 CJ 4.63.4 (“ne alieni regni, quod non convenit, scrutentur arcana”). Lee (1993) 63.

administrators to collect taxes on that trade.²⁶ The Sasanians could still impose their own taxes elsewhere, but maintaining multiple locations placed a greater logistical burden on them. Moreover, it could have allowed trans-border movement more generally to be controlled, or simply granted Roman authorities the authority over recording, storing, and presumably judging contracts for cross-border trade. This would have a prestige factor as well as conferring a practical advantage on Roman merchants who could have their contracts enforced in a Roman court under Roman law. The explicit notification that the intention of the edict of 408/9 was to prevent the flow of sensitive information across the border suggests that the same considerations were behind the restrictions of 298 and 363 as well.

These administrative and strategic benefits to the Roman Empire were balanced by private costs to merchants. The two empires shared a border from the Black Sea to Arabia, as well as the potential for maritime connections around the Arabian Peninsula. The further an inter-imperial merchant operated from Nisibis, the more difficult and expensive observing this treaty requirement would have been. Consider the burden on merchants operating along the Black Sea coast. Such a restriction would both be difficult to enforce and would make illegal continuation of their previous trade practices more attractive. Even within the Mesopotamian Borderland itself, the enforcement of a restriction on trade to Nisibis alone would have ruined the Euphrates and desert routes.²⁷ While the fate of the latter route is unclear after the third-century destruction of Palmyra, the Euphrates route certainly seemed to remain in operation. Ammianus' description of Julian's expedition shows a number of populous cities in the Euphrates which must have been connected by trade routes. Ammianus specifically notes trade wealth (*commercandi opimitate*) in his description of Callinicum on the Balikh. If all cross-border trade was restricted to Nisibis and the northern route, then exchange along the Euphrates route would have been severely curtailed.²⁸ For many, the savings to be gained by non-compliance would have outweighed the risks.

If all trade and movement was channelled through one point, why was Nisibis chosen as that point? The choice of Nisibis reflects the long-standing regional prominence of the city and indicates the importance of the northern route in the fourth century. Following the fall of Hatra in 240 CE, trade from Babylonia, across the eastern Jazira through Singara to the cities at the foot of

26 For Roman customs practices in Asia, see Cottier et al. (2008). For customs duties and tax in Egyptian trade: Young (2011) 66–69.

27 For these routes, see Chapter 6.

28 Young (2011) 188–90; Chaumont (1984).

the Tur Abdin seems to have shifted to the Tigris.²⁹ The Tigris was only navigable as far north as Bezabde, so disembarking and continuing inland through Nisibis was a natural option which made as much use of riverine transportation as possible.³⁰ Nisibis was a large city with a fertile hinterland at the eastern end of the northern routes to Syria and western Anatolia and with access to routes north into Armenia.³¹ Although it lay around 100 km west of the Tigris, not on the Tigris as Petrus records (Νίσιβιν τὴν πόλιν παρακειμένην τῷ Τίγριδι), it was the closest major city on the route to that river. The importance of the city in the Roman urban network of the borderland is indicated by its status as a *colonia*. Three of the other *coloniae* (Carrhae, Edessa, Reshaina) of *Osrhoena* and *Mesopotamia* lay further west on the route, while the last, Singara, was much smaller, held less fertile territory, and seems to have had a primarily military role which included supervision over the pastoralists around the Jebel Singar.³²

Nisibis itself was a strategically important city. It occupied a strategic position in a small fertile dry-farming zone between the arid plains to the south and Tur Abdin to the north. It first appears in Roman history resisting an attack by Lucullus with its impressive defences.³³ Festus reports that the city was besieged unsuccessfully three times during Constantius' reign (337–361).³⁴ When Jovian surrendered the city in the peace of 363, Ammianus, lamenting the act, calls Nisibis the strongest bulwark of the Orient (*orientis firmissimum claustrum*).³⁵ It served as the capital of *Mesopotamia provincia*, headquarters

29 Dignas and Winter (2007) 196. There is evidence of demographic shifts from the region of Hatra towards the Tigris, Hauser (2000).

30 Dignas and Winter (2007) 197.

31 For the fertility of Mygdonia, see Chapter 1; for the northern route across Mesopotamia, see Chapter 6.

32 Millar (1993) 144. Singara: Amm. Marc. 20.6.8–9; Kennedy and Riley (1990) 125–31, figs. 73–75.

33 Dio 36.6.

34 Festus *Brev.* 27.2.

35 Amm. Marc. 25.8.14: "Constabat enim orbem eorum in dicionem potuisse transire Persidis, nisi haec civitas habili situ et moenium magnitudine restitisset. Miseri tamen licet maiore venturi pavore constringerentur, spe tamen sustentari potuerunt exigua, hac scilicet, quod velut suoapte motu vel exoratus eorum precibus imperator eodem statu retinebit urbem, orientis firmissimum claustrum." (For it was clear that the entire Orient might have passed into the control of Persia, had not this city with its advantageous situation and mighty walls resisted him. Nevertheless, however much the unhappy people were tormented with great fear of the future, yet they could sustain themselves with one slight hope, namely, that the emperor would, of his own accord or prevailed upon by their entreaties, keep the city in its present condition, as the strongest bulwark of the Orient.) Loeb trans. Lightfoot (1988) 105–6; Dignas and Winter (2007) 199–200.

of the *dux Mesopotamiae* and a major mustering point of the *magister militum per Orientem*.³⁶ The important strategic role of Nisibis on the northern route can be seen in its replacement by Dara in the sixth century. After Rome accepted that it had lost Nisibis for good, Anastasius founded and fortified Dara on the northern route just the west of Nisibis. It was immediately a source of tension, although armed conflict did not break out until later in the sixth century.³⁷

The same considerations applied in 363 CE. Having been acclaimed as emperor by the army following Julian's death on campaign in Persian territory and needing to secure his rule against internal contenders, Jovian made a treaty with Shapur II to allow him and his army to return to Mesopotamia.³⁸ Ammianus records the terms:

However, the king stubbornly sought as our ransom, the five Transtigritanian regions which were his and which Maximianus had taken from him, as he claimed, a short while before as negotiations showed: Arzanena, Moxoëna, and Zabdicena, as well as Rehimena and Corduena with fifteen fortresses and Nisibis, Singara and Castra Maurorum, an exceedingly important stronghold.³⁹

The terms were the surrender of the Transtigritanian provinces. Ammianus names five regions, but the names differ from those recorded by Petrus Patricus: Arzanene, Zabdicene, and Corduene appear in both lists, but Ammianus names Rehimene and Moxoene, instead of Intelene and Sophene. This may indicate that the relative importance of these kingdoms between the Tigris and the Taurus had changed over the intervening 65 years. More importantly, however, was the surrender of 18 fortified sites along the frontier: 15 unnamed forts (*castellis quindecim*) as well as Nisibis, Singara and Castra Maurorum. Ammianus reckons this as an overly high cost.⁴⁰ The sites were to be turned

36 Amm. Marc. 14.9.1; 19.9.6 and 20.6.9. Lightfoot (1988) 107.

37 Dignas and Winter (2007) 100–104; Greatrex and Lieu (2002) 74–77.

38 Ball (2000) 25–26; Dignas and Winter (2007) 133.

39 Amm. Marc. 25.7.9: "Petebat autem rex obstinatus, ut ipse aiebat, sua dudum a Maximiano erepta, ut docebat autem negotium pro redemptione nostra quinque regiones Transtigritanas: Arzanenam et Moxoenam et Zabdicenam itidemque Rehimenam et Corduenam cum castellis quindecim et Nisibin et Singaram et Castra Maurorum, munimentum perquam oportunitum." Boeft et al. (2005) 233–39.

40 Amm. Marc. 25.7.10: "Et cum pugnari deciens expediret, ne horum quicquam dederetur ..." (And while it would have been better to fight ten battles than give up any of these ...) He characterised Jovian's surrender of the sites and relocation of the loyal Roman subjects as a betrayal: Amm. Marc. 25.9.8 "... Nisibi prodita, quae iam inde a Mithridatici regni temporibus, ne oriens a Persis occuparetur ..." (... betraying Nisibis, which ever since the time

over empty of their populations, sparking what must have been a considerable movement of soldiers and civilians from the border zone towards the centre of the empire.⁴¹

There is no notice of any other changes. As far as we know, Nisibis remained the place for transactions or contracts as stipulated in the treaty of 298. Although Ammianus is only concerned with the military and moral effects of the treaty, later writers indicate that Nisibis retained this important role as a focus of inter-imperial commercial activity.⁴² The burden of decentralised control of movement and tax revenue switched to Rome, while the economies of scale, advantages of local courts and familiar legal codes, and the prestige of control still lay at Nisibis, now in Persian hands.

This centralisation ended with an edict of 408/9 which prohibited merchants from going further than Nisibis, Callinicum and Artaxata to buy and sell goods.⁴³ As mentioned above, the stated aim of this edict was to prevent the movement of sensitive information across the border. The three sites to

of King Mithridates' reign had resisted with all its might the occupation of the Orient by the Persians.) Loeb trans.

41 Amm. Marc. 25.7.11: "hac perniciose verborum ille adsiduitate nimia succensus, sine cunctatione tradidit omnia quae petebantur, difficile hoc adeptus ut Nisibis et Singara sine incolis transirent in iura Persarum, a munimentis vero alienandis reverti ad nostra praesidia Romani permetterentur." (Jovian, inflamed by these dangerous hints too continually repeated, without delay surrendered all that was asked, except that with difficulty he succeeded in bringing it about that Nisibis and Singara should pass into control of the Persians without their inhabitants, and that the Romans in the fortresses that were to be taken from us should be allowed to return to our protection.) Loeb trans. Boeft et al. (2005) 240–41.

42 Eutropius 10.17; Festus 29; Iosh. Styl. 18: complaint that revenues of Nisibis were so high.

43 *CJ* 4.63.4: "Imperatores Honorius, Theodosius. Mercatores tam imperio nostro quam persarum regi subiectos ultra ea loca, in quibus foederis tempore cum memorata natione nobis convenit, nundinas exercere minime oportet, ne alieni regni, quod non convenit, scrutentur arcana. 1. Nullus igitur posthac imperio nostro subiectus ultra Nisibin Callinicum et Artaxata emendi sive vendendi species causa proficisci audeat nec praeter memoratas civitates cum persa merces existimet commutandas: sciente utroque qui contrahit et species, quae praeter haec loca fuerint venundatae vel comparatae, sacro aerario nostro vindicandas et praeter earum ac pretii amissionem, quod fuerit numeratum vel commutatum, exilii se poenae sempiternae subdendum." (The same Emperors [Emperors Honorius and Theodosius] to Anthemius, Praetorian Prefect. Merchants subject to our sway or that of the kind of Persia, must in no event hold markets in places that lie beyond those that were agreed on in the treaty with that nation, so that they may not improperly spy into the secrets of another kingdom. 1. No one, therefore, subject to our rule, shall thereafter dare to go beyond Nisibis, Callinicum and Artaxata for the purpose of buying or selling any wares, nor think of exchanging wares with a Persian outside of the cities mentioned; and both contracting parties may know that the property which is sold or bought outside of these places will be confiscated for the imperial treasury, and

which merchants could travel were along the northern and Euphrates routes and in Armenia respectively. If Nisibis was the sole site of trade, then this reflects a reopening of trade routes, especially along the Euphrates which had been so important in earlier periods. It is possible that this route never went out of operation and that either Petrus Patricus and the *Expositio* simply focused on Nisibis and excluded Callinicum, or that the trade still flowed along the Euphrates route (and through Armenia) but with some kind of reporting function at Nisibis.

Ammianus' reference to the Transtigritanian provinces brings their role in the Mesopotamian Borderland to our attention. Petrus Patricus reported that Rome was to have control of Intelene, Sophene, Arzanene, Karduene and Zabdikene, five regions between the Taurus Mountains and the banks of the upper Tigris.⁴⁴ These seem to have been in the possession of the Armenian king, so they were not strictly territorial concessions on the part of the Persians. Direct or indirect control of the Armenian throne was a major point of dispute between the Roman and Iranian Empires throughout their period of contact. Control of those Transtigritanian provinces meant control of the passes between Armenia and Mesopotamia. Because they were situated on the southern slopes of the Taurus, at least two of those provinces were included by Strabo in Mesopotamia: Arzanene was the site of Tigranocerta and Karduene was part of Strabo's Gordyene.⁴⁵ The name Zabdikene was probably related to the fortress Bezabde (Pinaka) which Strabo places in Gordyene.⁴⁶

What exactly it meant for the Romans to "have" (ἔχειν) these provinces is unclear. The treaty also specified that the border was to be the Tigris (τὸν Τίγριν ποταμὸν ἐκατέρως πολιτείας ὁροθέσιον εἶναι), yet these provinces were on the far side of that river as their collective name (*regiones Transtigritanas*.) suggests. In Chapter 3, I argued that Strabo's conception of the Tigris actually begins with the Botan which arises in Lake Van and flows into the Tigris proper. Even if this were the case here, at least Korduene and Zabdikene lie east of that river as well. The use of the Tigris as an inter-imperial political boundary must only apply south of Cizre, once the river enters the alluvial plains of Mesopotamia

in addition to the loss thereof, and the loss of the price which was paid or exchanged, the guilty parties will suffer perpetual exile.) Blume trans.

44 Festus includes a note on the treaty in his Breviarium. He writes (14.25) that that the frontier above the Tigris was reformed (*supra ripam Tigridis limes est reformatus*) and that the Romans held dominion over (*ditionem adsequeremur*) five *gentes* beyond the Tigris. Dillemann (1962) 217–18.

45 Strabo 16.1.23–24; see Chapter 4.

46 Strabo 16.1.24; Amm. Marc. 20.7.1; Boeft et al. (1987) 152–56.

themselves.⁴⁷ Dignas and Winter suggest that this treaty made the Armenian rulers of the Transtigritanian provinces responsible to Rome, but not under direct Roman control.⁴⁸ This may have placed them in a similar relationship with Rome as earlier client states like Commagene and Osroene. However, Lucius Verus' Mesopotamian garrisons provide a different model of Roman influence in the region. Rome may have established garrisons at key points in the Transtigritanian provinces intended to control particular strategic points, like the Taurus passes into Armenia or major population centres. A treaty with the Sasanid king would have legitimised such a deployment. Regardless of how this clause was implemented in the region, it shows a willingness by Roman and Sasanian rulers to agree on limits to their power and to formalise those limits in a treaty.

1.4 *Palmyra*

The final polity on which I focus is Palmyra. Whereas the previous treatments took a longer chronological view in order to examine changes in the geographical representation of the space through historical contexts, this section takes Pliny's description of the site as its focus. In fact, this is our only geographical description of Palmyra. Pliny places Palmyra in an ambiguous political position between the Parthian and Roman Empires, although the chronological period which his description reflects is unclear. A later report by Appian purports to describe conditions in the first century BCE, but seems more indicative of his own time. As a coda to this section, I briefly sum the third century rise and fall of Palmyra.

The political and legal position of Palmyra relative to Rome has been much debated. In his section on Roman Syria, Pliny the Elder described the city's location physically, politically and mathematically:⁴⁹

Palmyra is a city famous for its position, the richness of its soil, and the quality of its water, its fields surrounded on all sides by a vast circuit of

47 The Tigris appears as a military and administrative boundary between the two empires in Ammianus. At 18.5.3, a Roman buys property at Hiaspis on the banks of the river so that he may later cross undetected to defect to the Persians; the area is described as the furthest limit of the Roman Empire (*ad extremas Romani limitis partes*). The location of Hiaspis is unknown. When the Persians invaded Roman Mesopotamia near Nisibis in 359 CE, the Tigris is the border through which the Persians burst forth (*erupisse hostium vastatorias manus superato flumine*, Amm. Marc. 18.6.8–9.).

48 Dignas and Winter (2007) 126–28; cf. Jones (1971) 223–24.

49 For a discussion of the physical description of Palmyra, see Chapter 4. For Palmyra's position in inter-imperial and local trade networks, see Chapter 6.

sand, as if cut off from the world by nature itself, a private lot between two great empires of Rome and Parthia, and at the first sign of discord between them, always a concern to both. It is distant 337 miles from Seleucia of the Parthians, generally known as Seleucia on the Tigris, 203 from the nearest part of the Syrian coast, and twenty-seven less from Damascus.⁵⁰

The final clause of the first sentence (*et prima in discordia semper utrimque cura*) is usually taken as an inaccurate (or at least uncorroborated) statement of Palmyra's military importance between the two empires. This problem arises from an assumption that the final clause implies that both empires moved to secure it militarily at the first sign of conflict, which the sources do not support. However, to describe Palmyra as a "cura" need not mean that it was the subject of unattested military campaigns or manoeuvres. The precise legal position of Palmyra within the empire remains somewhat unclear: was the city a provincial centre subject to the governor of Syria, or an independent city-state with some degree of monitoring by the Roman state.⁵¹ The reality seems to lie between the two. Palmyra was incorporated into Roman Syria between 12 and 17 CE, prior to Germanicus' visit to the city in 17;⁵² however, Palmyra may have been the only provincial *polis* to maintain a standing military force.⁵³ In the Julio-Claudian period, Palmyra developed into an important centre for, and facilitator of, trans-Arabian trade.⁵⁴ Palmyrene forces escorted caravans across the desert and served as garrisons in several important caravan termini across the region, including Dura Europus, Hit, and other cities on the Parthian parts of the Euphrates. Regardless of its status in Pliny's time, Palmyra maintained a standing military force long after most client kingdoms in the region had been

50 Pliny, NH 5.88: "Palmyra urbs nobilis situ, divitiis soli et aquis amoenis, vasto undique ambitu harenis includit agros, ac velut terris exempta a rerum natura, privata sorte inter duo imperia summa Romanorum Parthorumque, et prima in discordia semper utrimque cura. Abest ab Seleucia Parthorum, quae vocatur Ad Tigrim, CCCXXXVII [m.]p., a proximo vero Syriae litore CCIII et a Damasco XXVII propius."

51 Will (1957); Will (1985); Will (1992); Sartre (1996); Gawlikowski (1994); Elton (1996) 90–92; Sommer (2016). Andrade (2013) 171–210 examines the cultural and social context of Palmyra as a "Greek" city within a "Greek" peer-polity network, a "Roman" city within an imperial power structure, and a city with its own distinctly local traditions.

52 Seyrig (1932) 266–77.

53 For a brief cautionary note on the entrenched assumptions that accompany scholarship on the Palmyrene "militia", see Sommer (2016) 13.

54 See Chapter 6. Palmyra's association with trading hints at a play on words in Pliny's description of the city as a *privata sorte*: *sorte* can mean principal, in the sense of capital bearing interest.

directly incorporated into the Roman provincial system. No doubt the loyalty of this military force was a concern to the governors of Syria. It certainly was after the third century when a Roman camp was built nearby following the defeat and capture of Zenobia.⁵⁵ Palmyra's position between the two empires gave it a unique position in the borderland, one that Pliny highlights by linking Palmyra to the Parthian capital Seleucia on the Tigris (Seleucia-Ctesiphon), the Mediterranean and Roman Damascus. In the ancient world, information moved at the speed of travellers. The people moving along the Palmyrene trading network could be a valuable source of strategic military intelligence in the event of political tension.⁵⁶ This could be an explanation of the kind of *cura* these two empires were concerned about.

The distances Pliny gives between Palmyra and the sites in its network were derived from the movement of travellers and were not particularly accurate.⁵⁷ However, it is important to note that, for Pliny's purposes, their absolute accuracy was less important than what they said about the connections between Palmyra and the two empires. Namely, that Palmyra was connected to the heart of the Parthian Empire, Babylonia, and the heart of the Roman Empire, the Mediterranean. Large scale, long distance trade relies on personal connections between buyer and seller. These connections often extended beyond commercial interests. For example, in the sphere of art, Palmyrene sculpture, painting and architecture show the influence of Greece, Parthia, and the other cities of Syria, melded together in a uniquely local style.⁵⁸ Palmyrene network links extended anywhere their trade network could be found, including Dura Europus and other sites along the Euphrates, Hatra, Egypt, Mesene at the head of the Persian Gulf, Mesene's outpost at Thilouan/Tylos (modern Bahrain), and northwest India.⁵⁹

The main problem with Pliny's description is deciding to when it refers. Because Pliny's description does not seem to match the political conditions that would hold in a Roman provincial city of the Flavian era, it is widely accepted that it is not an accurate representation of the political conditions of Pliny's own time.⁶⁰ Gawlikowski suggests that Pliny is reporting the situation

55 Kennedy and Riley (1990) 134–37, figs. 82–83.

56 Lee (1993).

57 See Chapter 4.

58 Seyrig (1950) 6–7.

59 For sites on the Euphrates, see Smith (2013) 145 and Chapter 4. Hatra: Yon (2013). Egypt: Casson (1989) 20; Tomber (2008) 80; Smith (2013) 161–62. Mesene: Chaumont (1974); Gawlikowski (2007) 129; Young (2011) 144–48. Bahrain: Gawlikowski (2007) 129. India: Smith (2013) 77.

60 In particular, see Will (1985).

in the first century BCE at the latest, presumably reflecting the conditions which led Antony to attack the city in 41 BCE.⁶¹ However, as Hekster and Kaizer have argued, those events are reported by Appian in the second century CE and reflect conditions in Appian's own time. Appian writes:

When Cleopatra had sailed home, Antony sent his horsemen to plunder Palmyra, a *polis* which was not far from the Euphrates, accusing them of a small matter, that they, being on the boundary between the Romans and the Parthians, interacted with both sides (for as merchants they carry Indian and Arabian goods from the Persians and dispose of them among the Romans), but by this deed he thought to enrich his horsemen. But the Palmyrenes learned about it beforehand and carried their essentials to the other side of the river and onto the bank, preparing themselves with bows with which they are naturally talented, in case anyone should attack them. The horsemen, seizing the empty city, turned around, not having met anyone, not having taken anything.⁶²

Appian calls the Palmyra of 41 BCE a *polis*, but also implies that the Palmyrenes were able to avoid the Roman attack by carrying off all their essentials (τὰ ἀναγκαῖα) and leaving the city empty (κενὴν). Archaeological evidence certainly suggests that there was some form of permanent settlement around this time, in particular, a Palmyrene inscription records the erection of a statue in 44 BCE.⁶³ As Hekster and Kaizer argue, the idea of a wealthy trade city which is able to transport away all of their wealth in the face of a Roman attack is logistically problematic.⁶⁴ They argue that the passage contains a number of errors and contemporary resonances, including the present tense of the parenthetical description of Palmyra as a trading town, the apparent location of Palmyra near the Euphrates, and the Parthian flavour of the Palmyrenes in this passage, that suggest Appian is thinking of contemporary affairs for at least part of his

61 Gawlikowski (1994) 27–28; Will (1985); Elton (1996) 90; Gawlikowski (2007).

62 App. BC 5.9: “ἀποπλευσάσης δὲ τῆς Κλεοπάτρας ἐς τὰ οἰκεία, ὁ Ἀντώνιος ἐπεμπε τοὺς ἱππέας Πάλμυρα πόλιν, οὐ μακρὰν οὖσαν ἀπὸ Εὐφράτου, διαρπάσαι, μικρὰ μὲν ἐπικαλὼν αὐτοῖς, ὅτι Ῥωμαίων καὶ Παρθυαίων ὄντες ἐφόριοι ἐς ἑκατέρους ἐπιδεξίως εἶχον (ἔμποροι γὰρ ὄντες κομίζουσι μὲν ἐκ Περσῶν τὰ Ἰνδικὰ ἢ Ἀράβια, διατίθενται δ' ἐν τῇ Ῥωμαίων), ἔργῳ δ' ἐπινῶν τοὺς ἱππέας περιουσιάσαι. Παλμυρηγῶν δὲ προμαθόντων καὶ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα ἐς τὸ πέραν τοῦ ποταμοῦ μετενεγκάντων τε καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ὄχθης, εἴ τις ἐπιχειροίη σκευασαμένων τόξοις, πρὸς ἃ πεφύκασιν ἐξαιρέτως, οἱ ἱππῆες τὴν πόλιν κενὴν καταλαβόντες ὑπέστρεψαν, οὔτε ἐς χεῖρας ἐλθόντες οὔτε τι λαβόντες.”

63 Hekster and Kaizer (2004) 72–73; Seyrig et al. (1975) 1.227; Hillers and Cussini (1995) no.1524 (wrongly dated to 44 CE).

64 Will (1985) 266; Hekster and Kaizer (2004) 73–74.

account.⁶⁵ In particular, we should consider Appian's statement that "as merchants they carry Indian and Arabian goods from the Persians and dispose of them among the Romans" (ἔμποροι γὰρ ὄντες κομίζουσι μὲν ἐκ Περσῶν τὰ Ἰνδικὰ ἢ Ἀράβια, διατίθενται δ' ἐν τῇ Ῥωμαίων) as reflecting the conditions of the second century CE rather than the first century BCE.⁶⁶

In the dynastic weakness of the third century, Septimius Odainathos, a native Palmyrene whose family had held Roman citizenship since Septimius Severus, rose to power in Palmyra.⁶⁷ Following Valerian's capture, Odainathos, now essentially the ruler of Palmyra, "defended Syria, recovered Mesopotamia" and campaigned as far as Ctesiphon, nominally as a general of Gallienus.⁶⁸ In 267/68, Odainathos and his son and heir designate, Hairan, were murdered at Emesa; Odainathos' wife Zenobia assumed control as regent of their other sons.⁶⁹ By the end of 270, Zenobia had seized control of the Roman east from Egypt to northern Syria, founded an eponymous fortress on the Euphrates, and had her oldest son Vaballathos take imperial titles.⁷⁰ Two years later, Aurelian defeated the Palmyrenes in several battles, seized Antioch, Emesa and Palmyra itself, and took Zenobia to Rome to be led in his triumph.⁷¹ Palmyra survived, but after rumours of an unrest there, a legion was stationed near the city. The subsequent reduction in Palmyrene independence hampered their liminal position as controllers of the desert trade routes between Syria and Babylonia and traffic moved north to the Mesopotamian routes over the following century, reducing the importance of the city.

Palmyra's political position in the Mesopotamian Borderland was ambiguous from Rome's arrival in the Near East and remained so until the third century brought an end to Palmyrene power. Palmyra's position commercially and geographically between Roman and Parthian space allowed the city to maintain a liminal position in the military, political and legal spheres as well.

65 Hekster and Kaizer (2004) 78–80. There is also a literary trope at play in the passage, namely a reversal of fortune motif for Antony, Hekster and Kaizer (2004) 75–78.

66 Although as Seland (2015a) notes: "That Appian describes the trading activity of his own time, however, does not mean that it had not started in 41 BC" (p.110).

67 Sartre (2005) 351–53 suggests that citizenship may have been awarded for services rendered against local adherents of Pescennius Niger in 194.

68 Eutropius 9.10: "Defensa Syria, recepta Mesopotamia usque ad Ctesiphontem Odenathus penetravit"; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 71–77. Aurelius Victor (*Lib. Caes.* 33.3) reports that the Sasanians still controlled Mesopotamia (Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 85).

69 Sartre (2005) 355; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 80–84.

70 Sartre (2005) 356–57; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 85–89.

71 Sartre (2005) 357–58; Dodgeon and Lieu (1991) 92–107. The sources differ on Zenobia's ultimate fate.

It seems that Palmyra's connections to the peoples and states to the east were sufficiently valuable to Rome that a degree of independence in certain other areas was permitted or perhaps even encouraged. The maintenance of a standing military force may have fallen into this category. These various ambiguities culminated and ultimately collapsed with the third century rise of Odainathos and Zenobia.

1.5 *Localising Roman Power*

The steady expansion of Roman networks of control into local political and social organisations can be seen in the works of the imperial geographic writers. As they proceeded chronologically, so the leading edge of Roman power slowly moved from west to east over the course of the first four centuries CE. Strabo describes Commagene as a wealthy and strategically important part of Roman space. The structure of his narrative emphasises the place of the former kingdom at the edge of Roman space. By contrast, Pliny barely touches on Vespasian's new annexation. To the extent that it is described, Commagene is not distinguished from the rest of Roman Syria. Just east of the Euphrates, Edessa appears only vaguely in Strabo's Mesopotamia, as a confused amalgam with Hierapolis/Bambyce, and Osroene not at all. By Pliny's time, and in his narrative, Osroene occupied a much more important place in the Mesopotamian Borderland. He describes the people and its cities in an ambiguous space between the two empires, narratively placed within the sphere of both. The ambiguity of the third century applies to geographical texts even more than historical texts. When the situation becomes clearer in the mid-fourth century, the geographical area of Mesopotamia had become politically and administratively divided between Sasanid space and the Roman provinces of *Osroena* and *Mesopotamia*, the former centred on Edessa and Osroene, the latter on Nisibis. The latter city became a focal point for political, military and economic activity as the border region became more rigid. A series of treaties and laws attempted to control the movement of people and information across this increasingly tense and militarised border between the Sasanian and Roman Empires.

The treatment of Palmyra in the sources is in some ways typical of the borderland polities encountered in the geographical sources. It does not appear consistently in all of them, it is linked to mobility, and it is placed in an ambiguous political position. Palmyra only appears in Pliny, is connected to the Babylonian and Mediterranean worlds by routes of movement, and is presented as sitting in an ambiguous political space between the two empires it connects. That ambiguity also applies to the representations of Commagene, Edessa and Osroene, and Nisibis.

2 Representing Power

This section examines two striking characteristics of Strabo's description of the Mesopotamian Borderland. The first is the ubiquitous imprint of Hellenistic imperialism. Through the first part of this book, I argued that the Roman imperial geographical writers did more than just mine the work of their Hellenistic predecessors for data and present a Hellenistic image of the space. Rather, they played an active part in the translation of this material and, in doing so, produced a Roman space from that material. The second characteristic is the considerable absence of Parthian power from the borderland space. I argue that these two characteristics are related. The Roman geographic writers drew on Hellenistic knowledge and material to construct a powerful historic imperialism that would supersede the contemporary authority of their rivals. In doing so, they constructed the Mesopotamian Borderland as an ambiguous space available for articulating claims about the extent of Roman power and the relative degree of imperial order, organisation, and control compared to their Parthian rivals.

2.1 *Macedonians*

Strabo's treatment of Alexander and the Macedonian conquest focuses the reader's attention on the past. In this case, that past comprises a Hellenistic history of imperial expansion which became a central pillar of imperial ideologies in the geographical areas it touched until well into the Roman period and beyond.⁷² Alexander's expansion brought with it a great deal of physical mobility, not just in terms of the conquering armies, but including the colonisation and administrative movement that followed. Macedonian colonisation is evident throughout Strabo's description of Assyria. As we have seen, Strabo's description of this region populated mostly by Aramaic speakers abounds with links to Greek culture:

The country alongside the mountains is quite fertile; the parts of it near the Euphrates and Zeugma ... are occupied by the Mygdones, who were so named by the Macedonians. In their country lies Nisibis, which is also called Mygdonian Antiocheia; it lies at the foot of Mt. Masius, and so do Tigranocerta and the lands of Carrhae and Nicephorium ...⁷³

72 Matthews (1989) 140: "The conquests of Alexander the Great and the work of his successors had long ago planted the landscape of Mesopotamia with Greek cities, which were within the intellectual horizons of men of the Classical world, even when they were outside its political boundaries."

73 Strabo 16.1.23: "Ἔστι δ' ἡ μὲν παρὸρείος εὐδαίμων ἰκανῶς ἔχουσι δ' αὐτῆς τὰ μὲν πρὸς τῷ Εὐφράτῃ καὶ τῷ ζεύγματι, τῷ τε νῦν τῷ κατὰ τὴν Κομμαγενὴν καὶ τῷ πάλαι τῷ κατὰ τὴν

Strabo knows this region as Mygdonia, a name given by the Macedonians. As previously discussed, Mygdonia had resonances in mythic Greek history and the Macedonian landscape.⁷⁴ Many of the sites within that space had multiple links to Greek and Macedonian culture. Zeugma, a Greek word meaning “link”, “bridge”, or “crossing”, was named for the important crossing of the Euphrates. It was founded as a Macedonian settlement on the west bank of the river by Seleucus and bore the alternate name Seleucia. Seleucus also founded the city on the opposite bank named Apamea after his wife. Mygdonian Antiocheia, the Macedonian name for the important city of Nisibis, was one of many Antiochs founded by Seleucid kings – Antiochus was a popular dynastic name. Nikephorium is also a Greek name, “bearer of victory”, although the founder is uncertain; Seleucus I is most likely, although some sources credit Alexander himself, or Seleucus II.⁷⁵ While Strabo does not go into detail about these Macedonian settlements, their very presence in the landscape and their Greek and Macedonian names in Strabo’s narrative gives recognizable evidence of cultural contact between former settlers and local people.⁷⁶ By infusing the landscape he describes with Macedonian elements, Strabo establishes and prioritises the links between the space of northern Mesopotamia and its Hellenistic history.

This prioritisation of Hellenistic elements fits with Strabo’s traditionally Greek understanding of the antithetical relationship between the cultural categories “Greek” and “Barbarian”.⁷⁷ This scheme was complicated by the strength and ubiquity of Roman power, a problem with which his predecessor Polybius had also grappled.⁷⁸ Strabo resolved the potential difficulty by placing Rome in the position of civiliser and bearer of Greek knowledge to the

Θάψακον, οἱ Μυγδόνες κατονομασθέντες ὑπὸ τῶν Μακεδόνων· ἐν οἷς ἐστὶν ἡ Νίσιβις, ἣν καὶ αὐτὴν Ἀντιόχειαν τὴν ἐν τῇ Μυγδονίᾳ προσηγόρευσαν, ὑπὸ τῷ Μασίῳ ὄρει κειμένην, καὶ Τυρανόκερτα καὶ τὰ περὶ Κάρρας καὶ Νικηφόριον χωρία...”

74 See Chapter 4.

75 Pliny (*NH*. 6.119) and Isidore (1) credit Alexander, Appian (*Syr*. 57) credits Seleucus I, while the Syriac chronicle of the twelfth-century Jacobite patriarch Michael the Syrian (4.78; Michael (1963); Brock (1979) 15–17) and the anonymous Greek *Chronicon Paschale* (Migne (1860) col 429f.) of the seventh century both credit Seleucus II with the foundation. Kessler, Karlheinz, ‘Nicephorium’ *BNP* 9.714; al-Khalaf and Kohlmeyer (1985).

76 Strabo’s narrative gives no information about the degree of segregation or integration of these groups but, regardless, some interaction must have occurred.

77 Dueck (2000) 75; Almagor (2005) 43.

78 Walbank (1972) 160–66; Momigliano (1975) 29–31, 37–39; Dueck (2000) 52–53. Strabo regarded himself as a continuator of Polybius and the relationship between the two authors is much studied. Two recent works with much to say in this regard are Clarke (1999) and Dueck (2000). In particular, note the presence of Polybius in Strabo’s lists of worthy predecessors (1.1.1; 1.2.1).

barbarians.⁷⁹ As culturally superior, the Greeks occupied a privileged position within the world Strabo constructed. In Mesopotamia, this emerged in the foundational role of Macedonian colonisation and in the links he established between the area and the Greek mythic past.⁸⁰ Moreover, these Macedonian places have contemporary Roman resonances for Strabo's readers. Zeugma remained the most important crossing of the Euphrates well into the Roman period and was periodically the site of a legionary base, as was Samosata in Commagene.⁸¹ Carrhae was the site of one of the most famous defeats in Roman military history in 53 BCE, Nikephorion was Crassus' most important base in that campaign against the Parthians, and Sinnaca was the site of that general's death. Nisibis may have been too far east to enter into Roman affairs much by Strabo's time.

Strabo's historical notes usually place notable episodes of local history into a Roman context.⁸² This is easily accomplished for the majority of his work as much of the area covered had been conquered and incorporated into the Roman Empire. Beyond the eastern extent of Roman territory, Strabo frequently used Alexander of Macedon, a figure with a powerful hold on the Roman imagination, to provide familiar context and to establish a link between the reader and the subject matter.⁸³ Early in book 16, Strabo referred to Alexander's victory at Gaugamela: "In Aturia is a village Gaugamela, where Darius was conquered and lost his empire" (ἐν δὲ τῇ Ἀτουρίᾳ ἐστὶ Γαυγάμηλα κώμη, ἐν ᾗ συνέβη νικηθῆναι καὶ ἀποβαλεῖν τὴν ἀρχὴν Δαρεῖον).⁸⁴ Although Alexander himself is not mentioned, the name Gaugamela would have been well-known to Strabo's educated readers. In ascribing the loss of Darius' empire to the outcome of this battle, Strabo drew a historical boundary between Persian and Macedonian histories and between Iranian and Hellenistic Greek culture. To connect

79 Dueck (2000) 79–84; Almagor (2005) 53. For the civilising influence of Roman conquest, see Strabo 3.2.15; 4.1.12.

80 Strabo (16.1.25) links the Gordyaeans to Gordys, the son of Triptolemus.

81 Edwell (2008) 18; Kennedy (1998d).

82 Although his account of Greece and western Anatolia is more closely linked to Homer. Syme described these portions as recycled Homeric lecture notes.

83 Many of Strabo's sources dated to the time of Alexander, or wrote in contexts in which there was political or cultural capital in linking the deeds of Alexander to people and places (This practice of Alexander's contemporaries was censured by Eratosthenes: Arr. *Anab.* 5.3.1; *BNJ* 241 F28 = Plut. *Alex.* 3.2; cf. Strabo 15.1.7–8; Biffi (2005) 148–51). However, while Alexander's conquests had opened the east to Hellenistic geography, it was not mandatory to mention the Macedonian conqueror in relation to every site which he visited. When Strabo mentions Alexander, we should assume that he did so intentionally.

84 Strabo 16.1.3.

Alexander and Assyria to Rome, Strabo drew upon the Roman celebration of their own national talent for governance and organisation.⁸⁵

In book 16, most of Strabo's references to Alexander concern the king's brief administrative record in Babylonia. He describes how the Macedonian demolished the artificial cataracts on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers which the Persians had constructed, according to Strabo, out of fear of attack.⁸⁶ He also notes that Alexander took care to inspect and maintain the elaborate canal system of Babylonia, with the implication that the Persians had not done so.⁸⁷

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- 85 Exemplified by Virgil's famous lines, *Aen.* 6.851–53: “tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento / (hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem, / parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.” (You, Roman, remember to rule the people with authority, (for these are your arts), to impose the custom of peace, to spare the subjected and vanquish the arrogant.).
- 86 Strabo 16.1.9: “Πέρσαι τοὺς ἀνάπλους ἐπίτηδες κωλύειν θέλοντες φόβῳ τῶν ἔξωθεν ἐφόδων καταράκτας χειροποίητους κατεσκευάκεισαν· ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐπιὼν ὅσους οἶός τε ἦν ἀνεσκεύασε, καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς ἐπὶ τὴν Ὠπιν.” (Now the Persians, wishing on purpose to prevent voyaging up these rivers, for fear of attacks from without, had constructed artificial cataracts, but Alexander, when he went against them, destroyed as many of them as he could, and in particular those to Opis.) Loeb trans.
- 87 Strabo 16.1.9: “ἐπεμελήθη δὲ καὶ τῶν διωρύγων· πλημμυρεῖ γὰρ ὁ Εὐφράτης κατὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ θέρους ἀπὸ τοῦ ἔαρος ἀρξάμενος, ἡνίκα τήκονται αἱ χιόνες αἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀρμενίας, ὥστ’ ἀνάγκη λιμνάζειν καὶ κατακλύζεσθαι τὰς ἀρούρας, εἰ μὴ διοχετεύει τις ταφρείαις καὶ διώρυξιν τὸ ἐκπίπτον τοῦ ῥοῦ καὶ ἐπιπολάζον ὕδωρ, καθάπερ καὶ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ τὸ τοῦ Νείλου.” (He also paid careful attention to the canals; for the Euphrates rises to flood-tide at the beginning of summer, beginning first to rise in the spring when the snows in Armenia melt; so that of necessity it forms lakes and deluges the ploughed lands, unless the excess of the stream, or the surface water, is distributed by means of trenches and canals, as is the case with the Nile in Egypt.) Loeb trans. Strabo 16.1.11: “Φησὶ δ’ Ἀριστόβουλος τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον αὐτὸν ἀναπλέοντα καὶ κυβερνῶντα τὸ σκάφος ἐπισκοπεῖν καὶ ἀνακαθαίρειν τὰς διώρυγας μετὰ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν συνακολουθησάντων· ὥς δ’ αὖτως καὶ τὰ στόμια ἐμφράττειν, τὰ δ’ ἀνοίγειν· κατανοήσαντα δὲ μίαν τὴν μάλιστα τείνουσαν ἐπὶ τὰ ἔλη καὶ τὰς λίμνας τὰς πρὸ τῆς Ἀραβίας, δυσμεταχειρίστον ἔχουσαν τὸ στόμα καὶ μὴ ῥαδίως ἐμφράττεσθαι δυναμένην διὰ τὸ εὐένδοτον καὶ μαλακόγειον, ἄλλο ἀνοίξει καὶνὸν στόμα, ἀπὸ σταδίων τριάκοντα ὑπόπετρον λαβόντα χωρίον, κάκει μεταγαγεῖν τὸ ῥεῖθρον· ταῦτα δὲ ποιεῖν προνοοῦντα ἅμα καὶ τοῦ μὴ τὴν Ἀραβίαν δυσείσβολον τελῶς ὑπὸ τῶν λιμνῶν ἢ καὶ τῶν ἑλῶν ἀποτελεσθῆναι, νησίζουσιν ἦδη διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τοῦ ὕδατος... ταῦτά τε δὴ πραγματεύεσθαι περὶ τὰς διώρυγας τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον, καὶ τοὺς τάφους σκευωρεῖσθαι τοὺς τῶν βασιλέων καὶ δυναστῶν· τοὺς γὰρ πλείστους ἐν ταῖς λίμναις εἶναι.” (Aristobulus says that Alexander himself, when he was sailing up the river and piloting the boat, inspected canals and with his multitude of followers cleared them; and that he likewise stopped up some of the mouths and opened others; and when he noticed that one canal, the one which stretched most directly towards the marshes and lakes that lay in front of Arabia, had a mouth most difficult to deal with and could not easily be stopped up because of the yielding and soft nature of the soil, he opened up another mouth, a new one, at a distance of thirty stadia from it, having selected a place with a rocky bottom, and that he diverted the stream to that place; and that in doing this he was taking forethought at the

Strabo presents these works as opening communication between Babylonia and the surrounding world, including Arabia.⁸⁸ The latter was particularly important for Alexander as he was apparently planning a military expedition against the Arabians before his death.⁸⁹ These activities of a successful ruler would have had particular resonance to a Roman audience familiar with the ideological stance of Augustus, Rome's first emperor, as the re-builder of Rome and re-organiser of the empire following the neglect of the late republic. Augustus and the ideological vision of Rome and Roman power were important themes in Strabo's work.⁹⁰

Strabo refers and alludes to Augustus frequently throughout his *Geography*, creating a picture of the Roman emperor as a conqueror, patron, builder, peacemaker and philhellene.⁹¹ Just as Strabo never enters into a full biography

same time that Arabia should not be made utterly difficult to enter by the lakes or even by the marshes, since, on account of the abundance of water, that country was already taking the form of an island ... Accordingly, he adds, Alexander busied himself thus with the canals, and also inspected thoroughly the tombs of the kings and potentates, most of which are situated among the lakes.) Loeb trans. Another example of Alexander repairing structures neglected by the Persians, 16.1.5.

88 Although the "cataracts" were probably important parts of the irrigation system of Babylonia, Bosworth (1988) 159.

89 Bosworth (1988) 168–70. Strabo 16.1.11: "διανοεῖσθαι γὰρ δὴ κατακτᾶσθαι τὴν χώραν ταύτην καὶ στόλους καὶ ὀρμητήρια ἤδη κατεσκευάσθαι, τὰ πλοῖα τὰ μὲν ἐν Φοινίκῃ τε καὶ Κύπρῳ ναυπηγησάμενον διάλυτά τε καὶ γομφωτά, ἃ κομισθέντα εἰς Θάψακον σταθμοῖς ἑπτὰ εἶτα τῷ ποταμῷ κατακομισθῆναι μέχρι Βαβυλῶνος, τὰ δ' ἐν τῇ Βαβυλωνίᾳ συμπηξάμενον τῶν ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ τοῖς παραδείσοις κυπαρίττων· σπάνις γὰρ ὕλη ἐνταῦθα, ἐν δὲ Κοσσαίοις καὶ ἄλλοις τισὶ μετρία τίς ἐστὶν εὐπορία. σκήψασθαι μὲν οὖν αἰτίαν τοῦ πολέμου φησὶν, ἐπειδὴ μόνον τῶν ἀπάντων οὐ πρεσβεύσαντο οἱ Ἄραβες ὡς αὐτόν, τὸ δ' ἀληθές ὀρεγόμενον πάντων εἶναι κύριον· καὶ ἐπεὶ δύο θεοὺς ἐπυνθάνετο τιμᾶσθαι μόνους ὑπ' αὐτῶν, τὸν τε Δία καὶ τὸν Διόνυσον, τοὺς τὰ κυριώτατα πρὸς τὸ ζῆν παρέχοντας, τρίτον ὑπολαβεῖν ἑαυτὸν τιμῆσεσθαι, κρατήσαντα καὶ ἐπιτρέψαντα τὴν πάτριον αὐτονομίαν ἔχειν ἢ εἶχον πρότερον." (For of course Alexander, he says, intended to acquire possession of that country, and had already prepared fleets and bases of operations, having built some of his boats in Phoenicia and Cyprus, boats that were constructed with bolts and could be taken to pieces, which were conveyed by a seven days' journey to Thapsacus and then down the river to Babylon, and having built others in Babylonia, from the cypress trees in the groves and the parks; for there is a scarcity of timber in Babylonia, although there is a moderately good supply of timber in the countries of the Cossaei and certain other tribes. Now Alexander alleged as cause of the war, Aristobulus says, that the Arabians were the only people on earth who did not send ambassadors to him, but in truth was reaching out to be lord of all; and when he learned that they worshipped two gods only, Zeus and Dionysus, the gods who supply the most requisite needs of life, he took it for granted that they would worship him as a third if he mastered them and allowed them to keep the ancestral independence which they had had before.) Loeb trans.

90 Dueck (2000) 85–106; Nicolet (1991) 20–24.

91 Dueck (2000) 96–106 collates Strabo's references to Augustus and his deeds.

of Augustus, so he never articulates a full comparison between Augustus and Alexander. Nevertheless, on several occasions their achievements are compared in passing or juxtaposed.⁹² In his description of Egypt in book 17, Strabo writes at some length on the negligence of the Ptolemaic dynasty and the reorganisation of that state after its conquest by Rome. Strabo concludes his description of the misrule of the last Ptolemies and Roman republican military dynasts with a note that, after the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium, “Augustus Caesar pursued and destroyed both, and stopped the drunken violence in Egypt.”⁹³ This is immediately followed by a note on the new status of Egypt (“ἐπαρχία δὲ νῦν ἐστὶ”), then a long passage on the orderly and prudent rule of officials appointed by Augustus.⁹⁴

The idea that Roman power and conquest had opened up communications with insular regions had an important place in Strabo’s work. The finale of his account of the Roman reorganisation of Egypt is a description of the increased trade and prosperity that had resulted from that reorganisation. Just as Strabo describes Alexander reorganising the water routes of Babylonia and removing the artificial impediments of a former empire from the rivers, so he has Roman power under Augustus reorganising Egypt’s political and administrative boundaries, removing former impediments and opening its wealth to the world.⁹⁵ Strabo explicitly focuses on trade beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire in his description of the Egyptian case, writing that large fleets now ply the routes through the Red Sea to India and Arabia.⁹⁶

2.2 *Parthians*

While Strabo is interested in historical matters, he is primarily concerned with the present and practical implications of his work.⁹⁷ However, in his description of “Assyria” in book 16, Strabo reduced the present rulers of the region, namely the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia, to a relatively minor role. They appear in three places: in Strabo’s description of Ctesiphon, in his description of the various oppressors of northern Mesopotamia, and in a discussion of the

92 Dueck (2000) 104; especially Strabo 1.2.1.

93 Strabo 17.1.11: “καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐπακολουθήσας ὁ Σεβαστὸς Καῖσαρ ἀμφοτέρους κατέλυσε καὶ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἔπαυσε παροινουμένην.”

94 Strabo 17.1.12: “It is now a province” Biffi (1999) 281–82. Strabo 17.1.12–13 describes the Roman organisation of Egypt and its virtues, Polybius’ distaste for the Ptolemaic organisation and the Roman encouragement of trade.

95 Strabo 17.1.5.

96 Chapter 6 examines the emphasis on trade in descriptions of northern Mesopotamia.

97 Strabo 1.1.23; 2.5.13; Dueck (2000) 51–52; Nicolet (1991) 73. For Strabo’s use of Polybius as a model in this regard, see Dueck (2000) 47–48; especially regarding Polyb. 3.7.4–7.

Romano-Parthian border at the end of his description of Assyria. In each of these locations, the Parthian role in the space under discussion is vague and underplayed.

In book 16, Strabo first mentions the Parthians in his treatment of the cities at the heart of Parthian-controlled Babylonia. After describing Babylon extensively, he describes its decline at the expense of Seleucia on the Tigris, the important Macedonian foundation and administrative centre.⁹⁸ Strabo introduces Seleucia as a great replacement to Babylon early in book 16; however this is a misleading description of Seleucia's status in Strabo's day. It is only much later that he describes the contemporary situation:

Long ago Babylon was the metropolis of Assyria; but now Seleuceia on the Tigris has that name. Nearby is a village called Ctesiphon, a large one. The kings of the Parthians made this their winter residence, sparing the Seleuceians, so that the Seleuceians might not be oppressed by the requirements of billeting Scythian people and soldiers. Because of Parthian power, Ctesiphon is a city rather than a village; its size is such that it receives a multitude of people, and it has been equipped with buildings and furnished with goods and arts suitable to them. For the kings are accustomed to spend the winter there because of the good air, and the summer at Ecbatana and in Hyrcania because of the superiority of their ancient glory.⁹⁹

98 Strabo 16.1.5: ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ὠλιγωρήθη καὶ κατήρειψαν τῆς πόλεως τὰ μὲν οἱ Πέρσαι τὰ δ' ὁ χρόνος καὶ ἡ τῶν Μακεδόνων ὀλιγωρία περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα, καὶ μάλιστα ἐπειδὴ τὴν Σελεύκειαν ἐπὶ τῷ Τίγρει πλησίον τῆς Βαβυλῶνος ἐν τριακοσίοις ποὺ σταδίοις ἐτείχισε Σέλευκος ὁ Νικάτωρ. καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτὸν ἅπαντες περὶ ταύτην ἐσπούδασαν τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὸ βασιλῆιον ἐνταῦθα μετήνεγκαν· καὶ δὴ καὶ νῦν ἡ μὲν γέγονε Βαβυλῶνος μείζων ἢ δ' ἔρημος ἢ πολλή, ὥστ' ἐπ' αὐτῆς μὴ ἂν ὀκνήσαι τίνα εἰπεῖν ὅπερ ἔφη τις τῶν κωμικῶν ἐπὶ τῶν Μεγαλοπολιτῶν τῶν ἐν Ἀρχαδίᾳ “ἐρημία μεγάλη 'στὶν ἡ Μεγάλη πόλις.” (... what was left of [Babylon] was neglected and thrown into ruins, partly by the Persians and partly by time and by the indifference of the Macedonians to things of this kind, and in particular about Seleucus Nicator had fortified Seleuceia on the Tigris near Babylon, at a distance of about three hundred stadia therefrom. For not only he, but also all his successors, were strongly interested in Seleuceia and transferred the royal residence to it. What is more, Seleuceia at the present time has become larger than Babylon, whereas the greater part of Babylon is so deserted that one would not hesitate to say what one of the comic poets said in reference to the Megalopolitans in Arcadia: ‘The Great City is a great desert.’) Loeb trans. Strabo also uses this comic line of Megalopolis, 8.8.1. The poet is unknown. Biffi (2002) 141.

99 Strabo 16.1.16: “Πάλαι μὲν οὖν ἡ Βαβυλῶν ἦν μητρόπολις τῆς Ἀσσυρίας, νῦν δὲ Σελεύκεια ἡ ἐπὶ τῷ Τίγρει λεγομένη. πλησίον δ' ἐστὶ κώμη Κτησιφῶν λεγομένη, μεγάλη· ταύτην δ' ἐποιοῦντο χειμᾶδιον οἱ τῶν Παρθυαίων βασιλεῖς φειδόμενοι τῶν Σελευκῶν, ἵνα μὴ κατασταθμεύοιντο ὑπὸ τοῦ Σκυθικοῦ φύλου καὶ στρατιωτικοῦ· δυνάμει οὖν Παρθικῇ πόλις ἀντὶ κώμης ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ

Strabo's narrative is remarkable. He begins with a contrast between the two cities he had previously mentioned (Babylon and Seleucia) signalled grammatically by a *μὲν ... δὲ* construction and chronologically by contrasting temporal adverbs (*Πάλαι ... νῦν*). Immediately after this, he adds the Parthian capital Ctesiphon as a third site, located nearby (*πλησίον*). Then he gradually gives further information about the Parthian capital of Mesopotamia: it is a village (*κώμη*), a large one (*μεγάλη*), the winter quarters (*χειμάδιον*) of the Parthian kings, it is a city rather than a village (*πόλις ἀντὶ κώμης*). He goes on to describe how the Parthian presence has resulted in a large and important city. Strabo delays this begrudging description of the Parthian capital until halfway through the chapter and then he reveals that description piecemeal as if unwilling to acknowledge it. He then immediately follows the description by mentioning Babylonia and Seleucia, the two great cities which he had already introduced near the beginning of the chapter. His arrangement of the chapter on Assyria emphasises the importance of Babylon and Seleucia and only later, and then grudgingly and briefly, acknowledges Ctesiphon as an important political centre. This construction serves to make light of Parthian power in Babylonia. It is typical of Strabo's treatment of the Parthians in this section.

The second case where the Parthians are mentioned comes amidst one of Strabo's descriptions of the Arabian Skenitai, tent-dwelling nomads of the north Syrian desert. Here Strabo notes that:

The parts of Mesopotamia which incline towards the south and are farther from the mountains, which are waterless and barren, are occupied by the Arabian Skenitai, a tribe of brigands and shepherds, who readily move from one place to another when pasture and booty fail them. Accordingly, the people who live alongside the mountains are harassed not only by the Skenitai, but also by the Armenians, who are situated above them and, through their might, oppress them; and at last they are subject for the most part to the Armenians or else to the Parthians, for the Parthians too are situated on the sides of the country and possess both Media and Babylonia.¹⁰⁰

μέγεθος, τοσοῦτόν γε πλῆθος δεχομένη καὶ τὴν κατασκευὴν ὑπ' ἐκείνων αὐτῶν κατεσκευασμένη καὶ τὰ ὠνια καὶ τὰς τέχνας προσφόρους ἐκείνοις πεπορισμένη. εἰώθασι γὰρ ἐνταῦθα τοῦ χειμῶνος διάγειν οἱ βασιλεῖς διὰ τὸ εὐάερον· θέρους δὲ ἐν Ἑκβατάνοις καὶ τῇ Ὑρκανίᾳ διὰ τὴν ἐπικράτειαν τῆς παλαιᾶς δόξης."

100 Strabo 16.1.26: "τὰ δὲ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν κεκλιμένα τῆς Μεσοποταμίας καὶ ἀπωτέρω τῶν ὀρῶν ἀνδρα καὶ λυπρὰ ὄντα ἔχουσιν οἱ σκηνῖται Ἄραβες, ληστρικοὶ τινες καὶ ποιμενικοί, μεθιστάμενοι ῥαδίως εἰς ἄλλους τόπους, ὅταν ἐπιλείπωσιν αἱ νομαὶ καὶ αἱ λεηλασίαι. τοῖς οὖν παρορείοις ὑπὸ τε τούτων κακοῦσθαι συμβαίνει καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀρμενίων· ὑπέρκεινται δὲ καὶ καταδυναστεύουσι διὰ

The Skenitai are the focus of the section. Strabo emphasises the fluidity of their mobility, a way of life with pejorative implications in the sedentary worldview of Greek and Roman culture.¹⁰¹ They are bandits (ληστρικοί) and shepherds (ποιμενικοί), characteristics which Strabo emphasises by explicating the conditions of their mobility: a lack of pasturage (αἱ νομαί) or victims to rob (αἱ λεηλασίαι). He then describes their victims, the people near the mountains (τοῖς παρορείοις), that is, the Mygdonians. The unfortunate Mygdonians are also harassed by other neighbouring groups: the Armenians and the Parthians. This is the second occasion on which Parthian power is mentioned in Strabo's Assyria. Here the Parthian Empire is placed in an equal position to the Armenians as oppressors (καταδυναστεύουσι) of the Mygdonian cities (with all their Hellenistic markers). The placement of this exertion of Parthian power in a section on nomadic banditry further minimises its force as a stable source of authority in the region. Parthian power in northern Mesopotamia is implicitly compared to, and placed on the same level as, the power of Armenia, a Roman client state, or that of the Skenitai, characterised as little more than bandits.

Strabo depicts contemporary Assyria as an ambiguous borderland space where political boundaries are elided and obscured. His description of Mesopotamia ends with a discussion of the border between the Romans and the Parthians:

The Euphrates and the land beyond it constitute the boundary of the Parthian Empire. But the parts this side of the river are held by the Romans and the chieftains of the Arabians as far as Babylonia, some of the chieftains preferring to give ear to the Parthians and others to the Romans, to whom they are neighbours; less so the nomad Skenitai who are near the river, but more so those that are far away and near Arabia Felix.¹⁰²

Strabo writes that the Euphrates is the “boundary of the Parthian Empire” (“Οριον δ’ ἐστὶ τῆς Παρθυαίων ἀρχῆς”).¹⁰³ He makes no overt statement about any territorial limit to Roman power. He goes on to say that the Syrian side of the Euphrates, even as far as Babylonia, is held by the Romans and nomadic Arab

τὴν ἰσχύν· τέλος δ’ ὕπ’ ἐκείνοις εἰσὶ τὸ πλέον ἢ τοῖς Παρθυαίοις· ἐν πλευραῖς γάρ εἰσι καὶ κείνοι τὴν τε Μηδίαν ἔχοντες καὶ τὴν Βαβυλωνίαν.”

101 Shaw (1995b).

102 Strabo 16.1.28: “Οριον δ’ ἐστὶ τῆς Παρθυαίων ἀρχῆς ὁ Εὐφράτης καὶ ἡ περαία· τὰ δ’ ἐντὸς ἔχουσι Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ τῶν Ἀράβων οἱ φύλαρχοι μέχρι Βαβυλωνίας, οἱ μὲν μᾶλλον ἐκείνοις οἱ δὲ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις προσέχοντες, οἷσπερ καὶ πλησιόχωροί εἰσιν, ἦττον μὲν Σκηνίται οἱ νομάδες οἱ τῷ ποταμῷ πλησίον, μᾶλλον δ’ οἱ ἄπωθεν καὶ πρὸς τῇ εὐδαίμονι Ἀραβίᾳ.”

103 Biffi (2002) 170.

chieftains, although some of those chieftains are more inclined towards the Parthians and others towards the Romans based on their proximity to each. Thus, Strabo explicitly defines a limit for the Parthians (which he then implicitly shows them exceeding) while he does not place a limit on Roman power, instead leaving the area which Rome controlled mostly implicit. This leads the reader to suppose that the reality of Roman power extended further than it did in practice. Moreover, by not stating a boundary to Roman power, it implies that it has no boundary, thus reinforcing the Augustan ideology of universal dominion.¹⁰⁴ By showing the Parthians implicitly exceeding their limit (ὅριον), Strabo also creates an ambiguous border wherein both empires could exercise power.

Following this description of the border between the Parthians and Romans, the rest of the chapter is devoted to a historical account of recent border relations between the two empires:

In earlier times, the Parthians gave heed to Roman friendship. They defended themselves against Crassus, who began war with them; and then, having begun the battle themselves, suffered the same fate when they sent Pakorus against Asia. (Antony, using the Armenian as an adviser, was betrayed and suffered badly in his war.) Phraates, his successor, was so eager for the friendship of Caesar Augustus that he even sent him the trophies which the Parthians had set up to celebrate their victory over the Romans. And, having called Titius (then governor of Syria) to a conference, he put into his hands four of his legitimate sons as hostages, Seraspades and Rhodaspes and Phraates and Bonones, and two wives and four sons of these, fearing civil strife and attacks against him. For he knew that no one could prevail against him unless that person supported a descendant of Arsaces, because the Parthians were extremely loyal to the Arsacids. Thus, he put his children out of the way, seeking to take away that hope from evil-doers. Now as many of his children as remain are cared for in Rome, in royal style and at public expense. The kings which followed him have continued to send ambassadors and attend meetings.¹⁰⁵

104 For Strabo's view that the limits of Roman power correspond to the *oikoumene*, see Dueck (2000) 109–11. For the relationship between Strabo and Augustan poetry, see Dueck (2000) 123–24. On Strabo as a spiritually Augustan work, see Dueck (2000) 159–60. In his discussion of the rise of Rome at 6.4.2, Strabo states that Rome and Parthia share a common border, but he does not give that impression in the discussion of the borderland itself.

105 Strabo 16.1.28: “οἱ δὲ Παρθυαῖοι καὶ πρότερον μὲν ἐφρόντιζον τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους φιλίας, τὸν δὲ ἄρξαντα πολέμου Κράσσον ἡμύναντο· καὶ αὐτοὶ ἄρξαντες τῆς μάχης τῶν ἴσων ἔτυχον, ἡνίκα

In this brief and selective account of foreign affairs in the region, Strabo places the blame for the conflict between the empires on Crassus, a suitable scapegoat as both a rival of Augustus' divine father Julius Caesar and as a Roman general whose spectacular military failure against the Parthians was repaired by Augustus' diplomatic efforts. Moreover, the historical tradition had attached several religious errors to Crassus' campaign, allowing an implicit contrast to be drawn with Augustus' revival of traditional Roman religious propriety.¹⁰⁶ To compound Crassus' failure and emphasise Augustus' success further, Strabo inserts a parenthetical condemnation of Antonius, Augustus' personal rival (Ἀντώνιος... κακῶς ἐπολέμησεν). As for the Parthians, their own attempts at aggressive warfare against Roman territory also failed (τῶν ἴσων ἔτυχον). This presentation of the period gives the Parthians agency but emphasises the mutual inability of the two empires to expand. Furthermore, Strabo twice states the desire of Parthian kings to establish friendship (φιλίας) with Rome: "οἱ Παρθυαῖοι... ἐφρόντιζον τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους φιλίας" and "ὁ Φραάτης τοσοῦτον ἐσπούδασε περὶ τὴν φιλίαν..." This use of φιλία may reflect the Roman language of *amicitia* and clientship.¹⁰⁷ By making the Parthians the active party in seeking friendship in both cases, Strabo places them in the position

ἔπεμψαν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν Πάκορον... (Ἀντώνιος δὲ συμβούλῳ τῷ Ἀρμενίῳ χρώμενος προὔδότη καὶ κακῶς ἐπολέμησεν)· ὁ δ' ἐκείνον διαδεξάμενος Φραάτης τοσοῦτον ἐσπούδασε περὶ τὴν φιλίαν τὴν πρὸς Καίσαρα τὸν Σεβαστὸν ὥστε καὶ τὰ τρόπαια ἔπεμψεν ἅ κατὰ Ῥωμαίων ἀνέστησαν Παρθυαῖοι, καὶ καλέσας εἰς σύλλογον Τίτιον τὸν ἐπιστατοῦντα τότε τῆς Συρίας, τέτταρας παῖδας γνησίους ἐνχειρίσεν ὁμηρα αὐτῷ, Σερασπαδάνην καὶ Ῥωδάσπην καὶ Φραάτην καὶ Βονώνην, καὶ γυναῖκας τούτων δύο καὶ υἱεῖς τέτταρας, δεδιὼς τὰς στάσεις καὶ τοὺς ἐπιτιθεμένους αὐτῷ· ἦδει γὰρ μηδένα ἰσχύσοντα κατ' ἑαυτόν, ἀν μὴ τινα ἐπιλάβῃ τοῦ Ἀρσακίου γένους διὰ τὸ εἶναι σφόδρα φιλαρσάκας τοὺς Παρθυαίους· ἐκποδὼν οὖν ἐποίησε τοὺς παῖδας, ἀφελέσθαι ζητῶν τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην τοὺς κακουργοῦντας. τῶν μὲν οὖν παίδων ὅσοι περίεσιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ δημοσίᾳ βασιλικῶς τημελοῦνται· καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ δὲ βασιλεῖς πρεσβευόμενοι καὶ εἰς συλλόγους ἀφικνούμενοι διατετελέκασιν." There are two textual problems with this passage. 1) Letronne and Groskurd both include a clause following "ἦνίκα ἔπεμψαν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν Πάκορον" which briefly explicates the heritage of Pakorus, Radt (2002) 4:306; Biffi (2002) 172. 2) I follow Radt in punctuating the following line with brackets: "Ἀντώνιος δὲ συμβούλῳ τῷ Ἀρμενίῳ χρώμενος προὔδότη καὶ κακῶς ἐπολέμησεν". This simply clarifies that Phraates' succession (διαδεξάμενος Φραάτης) proceeds from the Parthian kings, rather than from Antonius or the Armenians, the actors in the intervening clause. Biffi (2002) 172.

106 On Augustus' religious policies in the context of Roman religious practice, see Beard et al. (1998).

107 On Roman clientship and *amicitia* in the sphere of foreign relations, see Badian (1997); Burton (2011); Facella and Kaizer (2010). Augustus' account of the affair in the *Res Gestae* (29) uses the word *amicitia*, which is translated in the Greek text as φιλία. *Res Gestae* 29: "Parthos trium exercitum Romanorum spolia et signa reddere mihi supplicesque amicitiam populi Romani petere coegi." "Πάρθους τριῶν στρατευμάτων Ῥωμαίων σκῦλα καὶ σημεῖας ἀποδοῦναι ἐμοὶ ἱκέτας τε φιλίαν δήμου Ῥωμαίων ἀξιῶσαι ἠνάγκασα." (The Parthians I

of supplicant, subordinates them politically and minimises Parthian power in relation to Rome. This was in keeping with Augustan propaganda around the return of the legionary standards lost by Crassus at Carrhae.

The return of Crassus' lost legionary standards was a cornerstone of the Augustan ideology of eastern domination. Strabo's treatment of the affair is entirely in keeping with this perspective. The Parthian king Phraates IV (c. 37–2 BCE) was so eager for Roman friendship that he handed over four legitimate sons, two wives and their unnumbered sons as hostages (ὄμηρα) who are now all cared for at Rome (τῶν μὲν οὖν παίδων ὅσοι περίεισιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ δημοσίᾳ βασιλικῶς τημελοῦνται).¹⁰⁸ The bare facts of the affair were certainly open to the Augustan representation which subordinated the Parthian kings to Roman authority,¹⁰⁹ but Strabo's notice of the hostage giving reveals the likely truth which lay beneath. When he gave over these hostages to Rome, Phraates IV had ruled for over three decades and was looking to his succession. In sending these sons and wives into Roman power, he cleared the way for his young successor, the future Phraates V.¹¹⁰ Potential contenders to the Arsacid throne always came from within the Arsacid house: Phraates relatives were either potential rivals in their own right or potential pawns of rival non-Arsacid factions among other Parthian noble families.¹¹¹ Phraates himself had killed his father and thirty brothers to claim the throne and ensure his succession. Having ensured the succession of his favoured son, Phraates now succumbed to the same fate. Giving them into Roman power not only limited the role they could play in Arsacid palace politics, it isolated them from Parthian affairs and political connections as well as tainting them with foreign upbringing and potential disloyalty, reducing their threat to Phraates and his chosen succession.

This treatment of Parthian power and control in Mesopotamia was not based in ignorance on Strabo's part. He certainly knew about the Parthians and displayed some of that knowledge in his discussion of Parthia itself.¹¹² In that narrative, he gives a few paragraphs of description then excuses himself from writing more about the Parthians: "But since I have said much about Parthian usages in the sixth book of my *Historical Sketches* and in the second book of my *History of Events after Polybius*, I shall omit discussion of that subject here,

compelled to restore to me the spoils and standards of three Roman armies, and to seek as suppliants the friendship of the Roman people.).

108 Bivar (2000) 67–68.

109 For the Augustan representation, see Zanker (1998) 183–92.

110 Bivar (2000) 68.

111 Pourshariati (2008) 25–27.

112 Strabo 11.9.1–3.

lest I may seem to be repeating what I have already said.”¹¹³ Unfortunately Strabo’s historical works are lost, so our examination of Strabo’s knowledge of the Parthians is limited, but the fragmentary picture of them that we receive from the *Geography* suggests that he knew more about Parthian history and administration in Assyria than he provides in that chapter.¹¹⁴ At the beginning of his work, he credits the spread of both the Roman and Parthian Empires for an increased availability of geographical knowledge.¹¹⁵ In the Hellenistic and Roman context, much of this geographic knowledge was accompanied by historical descriptions of political and military activity at the edges of the empire. The same was probably true for the various lost Parthian histories. Strabo writes

113 Strabo 11.9.3: “εἰρηκότες δὲ πολλὰ περὶ τῶν Παρθικῶν νομίμων ἐν τῇ ἕκτῃ τῶν ἱστορικῶν ὑπομνημάτων βίβλῳ, δευτέρᾳ δὲ τῶν μετὰ Πολύβιον, παραλείψομεν ἐνταῦθα μὴ ταυτολογεῖν δοξώμεν, τοσοῦτον εἰπόντες μόνον ὅτι τῶν Παρθυαίων συνέδριόν φησιν εἶναι Ποσειδώνιος διττόν, τὸ μὲν συγγενῶν τὸ δὲ σοφῶν καὶ μάγων, ἐξ ὧν ἀμφοῖν τοὺς βασιλεῖς καθίστασθαι.” (But I have said much about Parthian customs in the sixth book of my *Historical Commentaries*, in the second book of events after Polybius, and thus we will pass over it here so that we would not seem to repeat what already has been said, although I will say only that the Parthian council, as Poseidonius says, is double, one consisting of the kinsmen and the other of the wise men and Magi, and the kings are appointed from both.) Translation adapted from Roller (2014). On Strabo’s other works, see Dueck (2000) 69–72. As well as his comments on the Parthians, something of the scope of his historical works is shown by fragments preserved in Josephus.

114 Drijvers (1998) collects the evidence for Strabo’s knowledge and writing about the Parthians.

115 Strabo 1.2.1: “καὶ γὰρ δὴ πολὺ τι τοῖς νῦν ἢ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐπικράτεια καὶ τῶν Παρθυαίων τῆς τοιαύτης ἐμπειρίας προσδέδωκε, καθάπερ τοῖς μετὰ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου στρατείαν, ὥς φησιν Ἐρατοσθένης· ὁ μὲν γὰρ τῆς Ἀσίας πολλὴν ἀνεκάλυψεν ἡμῖν καὶ τῶν βορείων τῆς Εὐρώπης ἅπαντα μέχρι τοῦ Ἰστροῦ· οἱ δὲ Ῥωμαῖοι τὰ ἐσπέρια τῆς Εὐρώπης ἅπαντα μέχρι Ἀλβίου ποταμοῦ τοῦ τὴν Γερμανίαν διχα διαιροῦντος τὰ τε πέραν Ἰστροῦ τὰ μέχρι Τύρα ποταμοῦ· τὰ δὲ ἐπέκεινα μέχρι Μαιωτῶν καὶ τῆς εἰς Κόλχους τελευτώσης παραλίᾳ Μιθριδάτης ὁ κληθεὶς Εὐπάτωρ ἐποίησε γνώριμα καὶ οἱ ἐκείνου στρατηγοί· οἱ δὲ Παρθυαῖοι τὰ περὶ τὴν Ὑρκανίαν καὶ τὴν Βακτριανὴν καὶ τοὺς ὑπὲρ τούτων Σκύθας γνωριμωτέρους ἡμῖν ἐποίησαν, ἥττον γνωρίζομεν ὑπὸ τῶν πρότερον· ὥστε ἔχομεν ἂν τι λέγειν πλέον τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν.” (Indeed, the spread of the empires of the Romans and of the Parthians has presented to geographers of today a considerable addition to our empirical knowledge of geography, just as did the campaign of Alexander to geographers of earlier times, as Eratosthenes points out. For Alexander opened up for us geographers a great part of Asia and all the northern part of Europe as far as the Ister River; the Romans have made known all the western part of Europe as far as the River Albis (which divides Germany into two parts), and that region beyond the Ister as far as the Tyras River; and Mithridates, surnamed Eupator, and his generals have made known the regions beyond the Tyras as far as Lake Maeotis and the line of coast that ends at Colchis; and, again, the Parthians have increased our knowledge in regard to Hyrcania and Bactriana, and in regard to the Scythians who live north of Hyrcania and Bactriana, all of which countries were but imperfectly known to the earlier geographers. I therefore may have something more to say than my predecessors.) Loeb trans.

that more recent writing about peoples and places on the fringes of the known world provides better information than that of the past. In particular, he notes “the writers of Parthian histories, Apollodorus of Artemita and his school” (“ὕπὸ τῶν τὰ Παρθικά συγγραψάντων, τῶν περὶ Ἀπολλόδωρον τὸν Ἀρτεμιτηνόν”).¹¹⁶ Little is known of Apollodorus of Artemita. He probably wrote a *Parthika* in at least four books during the 1st century BCE which described the rise of the Arsacids and the expansion of Parthian power from the Iranian plateau.¹¹⁷ Ten of the twelve extant fragments of his work recorded in *Brill's New Jacoby* are preserved in Strabo and all of them deal with places and events east of the Zagros Mountains, except for a fragment concerning the Iberi and Armenia.¹¹⁸

This is not just an issue of the sources available to Strabo, but an issue of how he selected material to highlight or obscure details in response to contemporary political currents. Potheary has shown how Strabo obscured Germanicus'

116 Strabo 2.5.12: “Μάλιστα δ' οἱ νῦν ἄμεινον ἔχουσιν ἂν τι λέγειν περὶ τῶν κατὰ Βρεττανούς καὶ Γερμανούς καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἰστρον τοὺς τε ἐντὸς καὶ τοὺς ἐκτὸς Γέτας τε καὶ Τυρεγέτας καὶ Βαστάρνας, ἔτι δὲ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Καύκασον, οἷον Ἀλβανούς καὶ Ἰβηρας. ἀπήγγελται δ' ἡμῖν καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν τὰ Παρθικά συγγραψάντων, τῶν περὶ Ἀπολλόδωρον τὸν Ἀρτεμιτηνόν, ἃ πολλῶν ἐκεῖνοι μᾶλλον ἀφώρισαν, τὰ περὶ τὴν Ὑρκανίαν καὶ τὴν Βακτριανήν· τῶν τε Ῥωμαίων καὶ εἰς τὴν εὐδαίμονα Ἀραβίαν ἐμβαλόντων μετὰ στρατιᾶς νεωστί, ἧς ἡγεῖτο ἀνὴρ φίλος ἡμῖν καὶ ἐταῖρος Αἴλιος Γάλλος, καὶ τῶν ἐκ τῆς Ἀλεξανδρείας ἐμπόρων στόλοις ἤδη πλεόντων διὰ τοῦ Νεῖλου καὶ τοῦ Ἀραβίου κόλπου μέχρι τῆς Ἰνδικῆς, πολὺ μᾶλλον καὶ ταῦτα ἐγνωσται τοῖς νῦν ἢ τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν. ὅτε γοῦν Γάλλος ἐπῆρχε τῆς Αἰγύπτου, συνόντες αὐτῷ καὶ συναναβάντες μέχρι Συήνης καὶ τῶν Αἰθιοπικῶν ὁρων ἱστοροῦμεν, ὅτι καὶ ἑκατὸν καὶ εἴκοσι νῆες πλέοιεν ἐκ Μυδὸς ὁρμου πρὸς τὴν Ἰνδικήν, πρότερον ἐπὶ τῶν Πτολεμαϊκῶν βασιλέων ὀλίγων παντάπασι θαρρούντων πλεῖν καὶ τὸν Ἰνδικὸν ἐμπορεύεσθαι φόρτον.” (In particular, the writers of the present time can give a better account of the Britons, the Germans, the peoples both north and south of the Ister, the Getans, the Tyregetans, the Bastarnians, and, furthermore, the peoples in the regions of the Caucasus, such as the Albanians and the Iberians. Information has been given us also concerning Hyrcania and Bactriana by the writers of Parthian histories (Apollodorus of Artemita and his school), in which they marked off those countries more definitely than many other writers. Again, since the Romans have recently invaded Arabia Felix with an army, of which Aelius Gallus, my friend and companion, was the commander, and since the merchants of Alexandria are already sailing with fleets by way of the Nile and of the Arabian Gulf as far as India, these regions also have become far better known to us of today than to our predecessors. At any rate, when Gallus was prefect of Egypt, I accompanied him and ascended the Nile as far as Syene and the frontiers of Ethiopia, and I learned that as many as one hundred and twenty vessels were sailing from Myos Hormos to India, whereas formerly, under the Ptolemies, only a very few ventured to undertake the voyage and to carry on traffic in Indian merchandise.) Loeb trans.

117 Gärtner, Hans Armin, “Apollodorus [8a]” *BNP*. D'Hautcourt, Alexis, “Apollodoros of Artemita (779)”, *BNJ*; Alonso-Núñez (1989); Nikonorov (1998).

118 D'Hautcourt, Alexis, “Apollodoros of Artemita (779)”, *BNJ*. See D'Hautcourt's commentary for the problems with identifying Apollodorus' material. The Armenian fragment is *BNJ* 779 F 2 = Strabo 1.3.21.

role in settling affairs in Armenia, Cappadocia and Commagene (all of which Strabo describes) out of respect for Tiberius' wish that Germanicus not be glorified after his death.¹¹⁹ Strabo had a large quantity of material at his disposal from which he selected carefully to construct the space to fit his understanding of the borderland and the events within it.

Strabo's *Geography* relies heavily on a legacy of Hellenistic knowledge and action, but the world he presents is centred on Rome. As I have argued elsewhere, Strabo's *Geography* orients its geographical description of Assyria towards past political power rather than current political power, adapts the Semiramis legend to this ideological purpose, and configures Semiramis as a foundational figure in the region, literally and figuratively.¹²⁰ Alexander and the Macedonians play a similar role by drawing attention to a past which had been co-opted into Roman conceptions of imperial glory and geographical expansion. Strabo's narrative prioritises Hellenism, and even pre-Hellenistic cultures, at the expense of the Parthians. When he does treat Parthian power in the region directly, he minimises it and subordinates it to that of Rome, implicitly showing Rome as the dominant force in a border region where their military ambitions had been repeatedly thwarted.

3 Imperial Space

Geography and imperialism are intertwined. The ability to conceptualise and organise space is required for conquest and government.¹²¹ This can be seen at the local level in the Roman practice of centuriation, discussed in Chapter 2.¹²² The collection, aggregation and presentation of geographic information at the start of the Roman Empire occurred during a time of reorganisation at the end of a period of widespread internal conflict. The imperial geographical writers each handled the division of imperial space and the representation of political boundaries differently.

In Strabo's time, Roman power had not penetrated Mesopotamia very far. Accordingly, Strabo's usual method of presenting a world dominated by Roman political and economic power was inadequate for this region. He could have modified his procedure of linking Roman space to Roman power by simply

119 Potheary (2002).

120 Cameron (Forthcoming).

121 Nicolet (1991) 2. Ando (2000) 277: "Imperialism possesses its own logic and requires a particular geography."

122 For the relationship between centuriation and the colonisation of the landscape, see Purcell (1990).

linking Parthian space to Parthian power, but instead he looked to the past for alternative methods of representing a space unbound to Roman power. He looked to the Greek historical and literary past for cultural connections with resonance to a Greek audience or to a Roman audience familiar with the Greek tradition. The cultural world of a Hellenised urban elite was familiar territory to Strabo and to his readers, accordingly in the absence of Roman political power, he linked the spaces he described to the “trans-national” Hellenic cultural power which Rome had adopted as her own. Literary links to the Greek scholarly tradition, historical links to Alexander of Macedon, cultural links to the Macedonian Seleucids, and a political narrative that obscured Parthian power at the expense of Roman ideology provided a substitute structure for Strabo’s presentation of the Mesopotamian Borderland. Strabo represents the internal political and administrative divisions of Roman space as well as the provincial organisation of the world overall. He provides the clearest indication of the separation of Roman and Parthian space by including an explicit notification that the Euphrates formed such a border.¹²³ Strabo’s narrative also supports a kind of intellectual boundary on the Euphrates. His descriptions of the internal divisions of the broader regions he describes become steadily less detailed and specific as his narrative deals with places further beyond the river. Commagene and other internal Syrian sub-divisions are reasonably clear with regional names associated with cities therein, Mesopotamia becomes more fuzzy, and Adiabene is confused.

This increasingly confused representation of extra-Roman space is found to an even greater extent, and in a more stark division, in Pliny’s work. Pliny reflects the new era of political control in *Provincia Syria* by portraying Syria as an ordered Roman space and the geographic area of Mesopotamia as a chaotic and ambiguously Parthian space.¹²⁴ Mesopotamia is discussed in two geographically overlapping sections and, for the most part, comprises multiple lists poorly anchored to geographic features and presented in a spatially disjointed narrative that blends into Assyria and Babylonia without concern for regional boundaries. By contrast, Pliny’s representation of Syria consists of a spatially linked itinerary around a defined area, albeit with the inland regions described in a pair of spatially confused lists. Nevertheless, the “Syria” described in book 5 is a coherent unit in a way that the space east of the Euphrates is not. Within that former unit, Pliny’s use of lists gives a sense of regimented organisation lacking in his description of the latter. This contrast between the organised

¹²³ Strabo 16.1.28.

¹²⁴ This dichotomy between Roman order and non-Roman chaos is also seen in Strabo’s *Geography*, but not in his description of Mesopotamia. Dueck (2000) 65–66.

Roman world of Syria and the disorganised non-Roman world beyond the Euphrates reinforces the overlapping zone east of the Euphrates as a political boundary region.

The less detailed accounts of subsequent geographical writers do not allow examination to the same extent as Strabo and Pliny, but their delineation of boundaries and imperial space can be seen to some degree. Ptolemy's work is the least political, but it nevertheless represents internal political boundaries within Roman space. Although he does not make the distinction explicit in the text, his work is structured according to Roman provincial organisation within Roman territory, while the structure is geographic and ethnographic outside Roman territory.¹²⁵ Within Roman spaces like Syria, space is further divided along political or administrative lines. However, in extra-Roman spaces, the internal divisions by which the narrative is structured are geographical not political (for example, "near the Euphrates", "near the Tigris", and so on).

The *Expositio* describes the Roman world in a provincial structure and some of the non-Roman world as a list of adjacent tribes and regions with varying levels of description.¹²⁶ While the *Expositio* does not discuss a border between the two empires, it draws a sharp conceptual contrast between urbanised Roman lands (*nostra terra*) and the ethnically defined areas to the east. The narrative of the *Expositio* begins to the east and progresses towards Roman territory. The construction of this narrative suggests that the author expects that the border constitutes something of an information barrier to his audience. In fact, it seems that the author of the *Expositio* has a limited knowledge of or concern for areas beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire. He reports narrowly on economic factors to the east that may be useful to his audience. As the narrative approaches Roman space, territories are described in either geographic or cultural terms. Where a reader might not be expected to know the people or land in question, *regio* or *gens* is used with the proper name for clarity, but where knowledge of certain lands or peoples is assumed, the proper name stands alone.¹²⁷ As expected, the latter cases increase in frequency as the narrative draws closer to Roman space.

For the author of the *Expositio*, space beyond the Roman Empire is imagined as a linear path through a series of geographic or cultural spaces, as a passing foreign traveller or trader might experience it. Through greater depth of information and relative complexity of topological information, the descriptions of

125 Berggren and Jones (2000) 40–41. Although the MS tradition contains inconsistencies in the division of the provinces, Diller (1939).

126 The non-Roman areas: *Expositio* 8–20.

127 *Regio* or *gens*: *Expositio* 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17. Proper name alone: *Expositio* 16, 18, 19, 20, 22.

the imperial *provincia* convey an impression of Roman order and prosperity not evident to the east. The source of this information is unclear, but it is not first hand. Just after the description of those extra-Roman territories, the author notes “and in fact, an historian (*historicus*) says this about the preceding peoples”.¹²⁸ This marks a break between information explicitly gathered from an unnamed source (the *historicus*) and information over which the *Expositio* implicitly claims a more expert knowledge.¹²⁹ When the narrative reaches the border, the *Expositio* pauses to give an authorial comment re-asserting authority over the narrative and marking the ideological boundary between Persian lands (*Persarum terras*) and Roman territory (*nostram terram*).¹³⁰ Rougé has cast doubt on the opening clause of the sentence containing the plural *terras* (“diximus enim Persarum terras”).¹³¹ However, if that plural form is genuine, then the juxtaposition of the unitary singular Roman *terra* against the divided and multiple Persian *terrae* fits the desired impression of the *Expositio*. In contrasting Roman order with Persian disorder, the *Expositio* reveals a significant continuity in Roman geographic thought over the first four centuries of the Roman Empire.

In Chapter 2, we saw a strain of continuity in the conception of the civilising influence of Macedonian colonisation between Pliny and Ammianus Marcellinus.¹³² Both authors introduce the borderland as a relatively backwards

¹²⁸ *Expositio* 21: “et haec quidem de praedictis gentibus historicus ait”.

¹²⁹ In a minor way, the appearance of the *historicus* in the narrative marks a temporal shift from a historical to a contemporary perspective. Information about non-Roman space was related to the narrator by a historical researcher, which implies that it is information about a past state, compared to the narrator's present position. However, this implication is not reinforced by the overall narrative or the grammar of the two parts (Roman and non-Roman).

¹³⁰ *Expositio* 21: “Quoniam vero necessarium est et nostram terram, hoc est Romanorum, conscribere, experiar exponere, ut possit legentibus prodesse. Incipiamus ergo. † Diximus enim Persarum terras ... †” (Since truly it is necessary to survey our land, that is the land of the Romans, I will attempt to explain so that it can be useful to readers. So we will begin. For we have described the lands of the Persians ...).

¹³¹ Rougé (1966) 154.

¹³² Pliny *NH* 6.117: “Mesopotamia tota Assyriorum fuit, vicatim dispersa praeter Babylona et Ninum. Macedones eam in urbes congregavere propter ubertatem soli” (All Mesopotamia belonged to the Assyrians, the population scattered in villages except for Babyon and Ninevah. The Macedonians gathered them together in cities because of the fertility of the soil.); Amm. Marc. 14.8.5–6: “orientis vero limes in longum protentus et rectum ab Euphratis fluminis ripis ad usque supercilia porrigitur Nili, laeva Saracenis conterminans gentibus, dextra pelagi fragoribus patens, quam plagam Nicator Seleucus occupatam auxit magnum in modum, cum post Alexandri Macedonis obitum successorio iure teneret regna Persidis, efficaciae inpetrabilis rex, ut indicat cognomentum. [6] Abusus enim multitudine hominum, quam tranquillius in rebus diutius rexit, ex agrestibus habitaculis

area which was improved through Macedonian urbanisation. Their conception of the borderland's history was similar, but their representation of its contemporary status shows an important development over the intervening three centuries of increased Roman activity in the area. Whereas Pliny's account of Mesopotamia presents a land implicitly divided between Hellenised cities and un-Hellenised tribal and pastoralist ethnic groups, Ammianus' survey of Syria presents the most important cities of the region, regardless of their apparent Hellenism, and even mentions the pre-Hellenic foundation of several communities.¹³³ Moreover, Ammianus does not contrast the relative levels of organisation of the two imperial domains.

Ammianus gives a coherent picture of the political border between the Roman and Persian Empires. He explicitly notes the point at which Julian's army enters Sasanid space, emphasises the crossing with narrative elements and historiographical tropes, and supports that notification with his description of the military activities of the army on either side of the border.¹³⁴ In 363 CE, the Mesopotamian border ran up the Khabur to the forts north of Hatra as far as Bezabde; a path that is well-defined near the Euphrates where a geographical feature (the Khabur) allowed precision and less precise in the lands south and east of Nisibis. The internal divisions of the two empires are marked, but are not geographically specified as precisely as in other writers; for example, the boundaries between the provinces of Syria, Osrhoena and Mesopotamia

urbes construxit multis opibus firmas et viribus, quarum ad praesens pleraeque licet Graecis nominibus appellentur, quae isdem ad arbitrium inposita sunt conditoris, primigenia tamen nomina non amittunt, quae eis Assyria lingua institutores veteres indiderunt. (But the frontier of the East, extending a long distance in a straight line, reaches from the banks of the Euphrates to the borders of the Nile, bounded on the left by the Saracen peoples and open on the right to the waves of the sea. Seleucus Nicator took possession of the region and greatly increased it in power, when, after the death of Alexander of Macedon, he was holding the rule of Persia by right of succession; a capable and successful king, as his surname [Nicator] indicates. [6] For he took advantage of the great number of men whom he ruled for a long time in peace, and built cities that were secure in wealth and power out of their rustic dwellings. Now most of these are called by the Greek names which their founder imposed upon them, nevertheless have not lost the original names which their ancient settlers gave them in the Assyrian language.)

133 For example, 14.8.9: "Post hanc acclinis Libano monti Phoenice, regio plena gratiarum et venustatis, urbibus decorata magnis et pulchris; in quibus amoenitate celebritateque nominum Tyros excellit, Sidon et Berytus eisdemque pares Emissa et Damascus saeculis condita priscis." (After this comes Phoenicia, lying at the foot of Mount Libanus, a region full of charm and beauty, adorned with many great cities; among these in attractiveness and the renown of their names Tyre, Sidon and Berytus are conspicuous, and equal to these are Emissa and Damascus, founded in days long past.) Loeb trans. Balty and Balty (1981) 60.

134 See Chapter 3.

are not defined. As far as we can tell from the extant geographical descriptions in his work, Ammianus also used the Euphrates as a regional boundary between Syria and Mesopotamia, but the historian was more concerned with political activities and boundaries than geographical description and boundaries. Although the form of his lost description of Mesopotamia is unknown, in the extant portion of his work Ammianus never explicitly describes the geographical borders of Mesopotamia and refers more often to Roman administrative categories than geographical regions. Moreover, in Sasanid territory, he considers all of Assyria as one region, bounded by the Niphates and Zagros Mountains to the north and east and by Roman territory to the west.

4 Mesopotamia as a Frontier

In Chapter 1, I asked how the Roman imperial geographic writers imagined the frontier and how they conveyed that imaginary to their audiences. I introduced the idea of the “borderland” as a theoretical framework to consider the representation of a politically ambiguous space between two imperial territories. This framework, particularly Bradley Parker’s concepts of boundary sets and the continuum of borderland dynamics, has structured my consideration of the region. This theoretical approach offers a productive way of thinking about the processes that occur in the spaces between large complex groups, such as the Iranian and Roman Empires of the first four centuries CE.

The fundamental question of how the Roman imperial geographical writers imagined the frontier can be re-expressed in terms of this borderland framework: Did the geographical writers imagine the borderland as a zone of interacting boundary sets or did most of the region’s boundaries coalesce into a single rigid line? Did that perception change as the geopolitical relationship between the empires developed?

As we saw in Chapter 3, the geographic boundaries of the borderland were quite static over the course of the four centuries under examination. Geographical space remained defined by the two great rivers and the Taurus Mountains. Subsequent chapters showed that the political boundaries of the space were not at all static. As I noted above, ambiguity was a common feature to the conception of the Mesopotamian Borderland in all of the Roman geographical works. Strabo implies that the border between the two empires is fuzzy, especially amongst the Skenitai. Pliny has the two domains overlap. The *Expositio* makes no attempt to delimit the respective spaces. Ammianus is clear on the border at the Khabur, but vague to the north between Nisibis and the ruins of Hatra. In the first century CE, the border between the two empires

was represented as a zone of interaction rather than a rigid line. Strabo refers to the Euphrates as a border, but only states that it was a limit to the Parthians. Inside that limit he downplays their power. Pliny only refers to a historical border, that of Pompey, and he does not explicitly name a border in his own time. By the time of Ammianus, a conception of a linear border does seem to have developed, although where exactly that line lay is unclear at times.

I noted that the Euphrates formed a nominal or symbolic border between the Roman and Parthian Empires. This symbolism is apparent in the historical literature of the first and second centuries CE from the Roman arrival in the Near East with Lucullus and Pompey to the conquests of territory within the geographical area of Mesopotamia by Lucius Verus and Septimius Severus. Plutarch reports that Lucullus performed a sacrifice at the Euphrates before crossing to attack Tigranocerta in 69 BCE.¹³⁵ During the first century CE, the symbolism of the Euphrates was emphasised by several notable meetings between the dynastic families of both empires. Strabo was alive for only the first, a meeting on the Euphrates in 2 CE between Gaius and Phraates V.¹³⁶

[Gaius] met the king of the Parthians, a most distinguished young man, on an island in the Euphrates, with an equal retinue on each side. [2] Early in my military career, while serving as a tribune, I managed to see this exceptionally remarkable and memorable spectacle of the Roman army standing on one side, the Parthian on the other, while these two eminent leaders of their empires and of humanity met. [3] ... First the Parthian dined with Gaius on our bank of the river; later Gaius dined with the king on the bank of the enemy.¹³⁷

The historians from whom much of our knowledge of the first-century Mesopotamian Borderland comes, Dio, Appian, Tacitus and Plutarch, all wrote as if the Euphrates was a border, but all wrote in periods where significant Roman military activity took place on the other side of that border; crossing it was not so much a territorial invasion as a signal of aggression.¹³⁸

135 Plut. *Luc.* 24.5–7.

136 Dio 55.10.18–19. Sherwin-White (1984) 326–27.

137 Vell. Pat. 2.101.1–3: “Cum rege Parthorum, iuvene excelsissimo, in insula quam amnis Euphrates ambiebat, aequato utriusque partis numero coiit. [2] Quod spectaculum stantis ex diverso hinc Romani, illinc Parthorum exercitus, cum duo inter se eminentissima imperiorum et hominum coirent capita, perquam clarum et memorabile sub initia stipendiorum meorum tribuno militum mihi visere contigit: [3] ... Prior Parthus apud Gaium in nostra ripa, posterior hic apud regem in hostili epulatus est.”

138 Appian on the Euphrates as a border: Hekster and Kaizer (2004) 78–79. Just as the Euphrates was symbolic as a border, the Tigris became symbolic as a goal. Gabinius, Pompey’s general, advanced “as far as the Tigris”: ὅ τε Γαβίνιος καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸν Εὐφράτην μέχρι

Rivers are highly visible geographic markers which often serve symbolic roles, whether as boundaries or as connective routes of mobility between spaces.¹³⁹ The importance of rivers as symbols is also suggested by the degree to which geographical writers describe the hydraulic control of the landscape. Purcell discusses the emphasis which Strabo and Pliny place on this aspect of Roman control of the landscape in his discussion of Cisalpine Gaul.¹⁴⁰ This representation of power over the landscape can also be seen in Strabo's interest in relating details concerning the manipulation of the river systems of southern Mesopotamia. His discussion of Semiramis' building projects is particularly concerned with her control over the hydraulic landscape of Babylonia.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, while hints of the Euphrates as a symbolic boundary appear in Strabo and Pliny, their ambiguous presentations of the boundary problematise that symbolism. Both authors were more concerned to show the historical, political and potential administrative reach of Roman power east of the Euphrates than they were to reinforce a narrative of a limit to Roman power at that river. This ambiguity was indicative of the broader historiographical context in which the border was symbolic rather than restrictive. A place ritually inscribed as a boundary but not considered a practical limit on the exercise of various sorts of power.

Trajan's campaigns in the Mesopotamian Borderland had a profound effect on the way future Roman emperors perceived Mesopotamia and the east.¹⁴² The liminal symbolism that the Euphrates had accrued, as well as the fears of Parthian military superiority instilled at Carrhae, were removed. Trajan's lengthy stay in Antioch was a return to the focus on the eastern edge of the empire displayed by Pompey and Antony.¹⁴³ By the fourth century, Roman administrative power had expanded east of the Euphrates through successive military campaigns. The expansion of *colonia* and the development of cities and fortresses had significantly increased Roman investment in the region.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the region's population had developed a significant number of connections (commercial, military, professional, social, and so on) with the wider Roman Empire. The definition and maintenance of boundaries between

τοῦ Τίγριδος προσχώρησεν. Crassus was censured for delaying when he could have advanced as far as the Tigris.

139 Isaac (1990) 102–3; Whittaker (1994) 26–27; Murphy (2004) 142; B.J. Parker (2006) 83.

140 Purcell (1990) 18.

141 Strabo 16.1.2; Cameron (Forthcoming). Pliny uses rivers as markers to define space and divide groups; for both, see *NH* 6.129.

142 Millar (1993) 99–100. On the reasons for Trajan's campaigns: Griffin (2000b) 125–27; Ball (2000) 16–17.

143 Ball (2000) 16–17; Kennedy (1996b) 88; Griffin (2000b) 126–27; Millar (1993) 102, 104–5; Jones (1971) 220.

144 Jones (1971) 220–21.

Roman and Persian space was important on both a local and imperial scale. Nisibis' focal position in diplomatic and economic affairs illustrates this importance.¹⁴⁵

Geographic writing can tend to be treated as an objective description of space, but the processes of selection, generalisation and aggregation that underlie geographic projects are inherently subjective.¹⁴⁶ While all space is ideologically constructed, borderland spaces are particularly ripe for ambiguous and selective description between competing narratives. By their selection and presentation of material, use of historical comparanda, and treatment of imperial power and contemporary political relationships, the Roman imperial geographic writers created a geography of the Mesopotamian Borderland centred on Roman power. The geographical writers presented local political structures in ambiguous terms. Their consideration of inter-imperial relations was the same strategy writ-large. In their perspectives on the Mesopotamian Borderland, all non-Roman sources of contemporary authority were rendered vague and ambiguous, shifting and transient, and unchallenging to Roman dominion. All of these representations reveal the deliberate and selective nature of their geographic narratives, as well as contributing to our understanding of how Roman geographical authors conceived of the relationships between Rome, Parthia, and the intervening borderland.

145 See above and Chapter 6.

146 Purcell (1990).

Epilogue: Connecting

Located between two large empires, the Mesopotamian Borderland was a space both at the edge of the Roman world and at the centre of the inhabited world. This epilogue considers the Mesopotamian Borderland in a global frame. I begin by defining what “global” means in this context. I will then examine two types of connection by which Mesopotamia is linked to global concerns: the first being the physical connections of mobility to global networks that spanned the Roman world and connected the Roman and Iranian spheres, and the second being the conceptual connections to Roman understandings of a global world.

1 Globalisation and Networks in the Mesopotamian Borderland

Studies of globalisation examine the intersection and interaction between the “universal” and the “local”.¹ The former are commonalities supposed to hold across a “global” space and the latter are the peculiarities of particular places within that global space that act on, and are acted on, by those universal commonalities. Both the universal and the local bear the marks of their place of origin.² Empires epitomise the ability of localities to export particular cultural aspects and ideologies and project them across their empire as universals.³ It is possible to conceive of a global world in the Roman imperial period in two ways: 1) by imagining the Mediterranean empire of Rome as a globality, and 2) by including the regions beyond Roman control to imagine the “known world” as a global system.

Modern research on global networks may be useful here. As so often, however, modern theoretical frameworks emphasise the role of the nation-state

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- 1 Hopkins (2006) esp. 7–9; Casalilla (2007); Hodos (2015) 244–49. The papers in Pitts and Versluys (2015a) draw on many strands of research on contemporary globalisation to examine the place of globalisation in historical studies of the Roman world. Although archaeology is their focus, the papers have broader application for Roman studies generally.
 - 2 Hopkins (2006) 27. Laurence and Trifilò (2015) provide a series of case studies examining funeral epigraphy, public monuments, and bathing as locally distinct manifestations of a “global” culture.
 - 3 Hopkins (2006) 9; Moatti (2006).

in the definition and analysis of “global” or “transnational” phenomena.⁴ Such theories can often be useful to the ancient world if we reconceptualise the national borders which so concern modern theorists into the more general form of boundaries. Because boundaries existed in all historical periods, this can grant “global” and “transnational” theories some analytical power in historical periods before the “nation”, in the modern sense.⁵ There is much to be said for considering the growth of the Roman Empire in terms of network expansion.⁶ In the same way, there may be value in considering the resulting Mediterranean-wide polity as a “global” network in which a large number of local groups with distinct cultural structures are linked by certain universal ideological structures of culture, law, history, literature, religion, administration and so on propagated by the Roman centre.⁷

The relationship between the ability of Roman power to enforce peace and these international networks of trade and communication was clear to Pliny:

For who would not think that when the world had been united by the sovereignty of the Roman Empire that life improved because of the trade of goods, the fellowship of a festal peace, and because everything was made available for common use, even those things which had been hidden before?⁸

This vision of a world opened and connected by Roman power is visible in his description of Palmyra, positioned narratively within the Roman sphere

4 Casalilla (2007) 660–65; Jacobson (1997). See also the criticisms of Wallerstein in Stein (1999).

5 “[W]hether or not all globalisation theorists would approve, there is no substantive problem with considering the application of their ideas to the study of change at a sub-global level ...” Morley (2015) 52.

6 A topic which awaits full exploration. See my comments on a network perspective on states and population groups in Chapter 5. On the oikumene as a hyper-network “which we should call ‘global’ to better indicate the degree of connectivity and time-space compression we are talking about”, Versluys (2015) 163. Time-space compression is another theory of globalisation that can be applied in modified form to the ancient world, Morley (2015) 53–59; Hodos (2015) 240–44. On the relationship between globalisation and network theory, see Morley (2015) 62–65; Hodos (2015) 248–49.

7 Ando (2000); Holton (2008) 17–48; Hodos (2015) 240–44. The applicability of theories of globalisation to the Roman world is addressed in repeatedly in Pitts and Versluys (2015a); in particular, see the introduction Pitts and Versluys (2015b) and the analysis of historic phases of globalisation in Nederveen Pieterse (2015) 236.

8 Pliny *NH* 14.2: “Quis enim non communicato orbe terrarum maiestate Romani imperii profecisse vitam putet commercio rerum ac societate festae pacis omniaque, etiam quae ante occulta fuerant, in promiscuo usu facta?”.

and linked to the Mediterranean and Seleucia-Ctesiphon.⁹ Pliny's construction implies that he considered Seleucia-Ctesiphon and the Syrian coast to have a certain equivalence within their respective empires. Both places had great symbolic and practical value as centres of economic movement, Seleucia-Ctesiphon as the capital and hub of a large land empire and the Mediterranean as the main highway of the Roman Empire. Pliny conceived of a world under Rome, but his rhetorical question applies to the world more broadly: stability within the Roman Empire was a precondition for Romans to reliably participate in global network relationships between Roman and non-Roman space.

Holton's definition of global networks as a research field requires that these networks cross political borders and connect multiple countries.¹⁰ Moreover, it requires that this movement not be short term – that it be multicentred and autonomous from the domination of a single nation or cultural group. The networks of commercial movement discussed in Chapter 6 provide a likely context for such global networks. The Roman imperial geographic writers represented both local and global networks in their works, but in their construction of the Mesopotamian Borderland their focus was on the global, inter-imperial networks. Strabo presents the Mesopotamian Borderland as a space through which these inter-imperial networks operate, while the *Expositio* emphasises the cities of the eastern provinces as spaces focused on trade with the Persians and other non-Roman peoples.¹¹ The inter-imperial trade network of Palmyra may qualify as a global network according to Hopkin's definition, as may some of the diasporic communities at Dura Europus.¹²

2 The Conceptualisation of the Mesopotamian Borderland

Finally, it remains to examine how the Mesopotamian Borderland fits within the Roman understanding of a global world. This study implicitly assumes that these geographical works had an audience. Strabo and Pliny certainly both wrote as if their works would be read by members of the Roman political class. Lewis and Wigen's call the set of spatial structures by which people order their knowledge of the world a "metageography".¹³ The Roman metageography

9 Pliny *NH* 5.88. For the *Natural History* opening the world to Roman vision, especially that of its dedicatee, the future emperor Titus, see Murphy (2004) 5. For the emperor as the ultimate authority on knowledge of nature, Murphy (2004) 197–203.

10 Holton (2008) 42–43.

11 *Expositio* 19, 38, 40.

12 Sommer (2006); Wharton (1995); Dirven (1998); Eckardt et al. (2010).

13 Lewis and Wigen (1997) xi.

reflected in the imperial geographic writers conforms to what we would expect from the worldview of an imperial elite.

This Roman metageography was largely imperial in nature.¹⁴ However, it was not simply a local Roman ideological structure projected to a universal of the Roman Empire, rather, it developed in the context of, and in dialogue with, a Hellenistic imperial metageography. The delimitations and especially denominations of the Mesopotamian Borderland in Roman imperial geographic writing were initially derived from the campaigns and colonial projects of Alexander and his successors. Roman writers delimited the geographical spaces of “Mesopotamia”, “Syria”, “Adiabene”, and “Arabia” according to the Classical Greek and Hellenistic understandings of those spaces. Roman imperialism operated on the borderland itself, as is reflected in the changing political borders of the borderland states, but it also operated on the geographical conceptions of that space. Moatti has argued that translation is a form of imperialism.¹⁵ The Roman imperial geographic writers translated Hellenistic geographic conceptions of the Mesopotamian Borderland as a space stamped with the symbols of Hellenistic imperialism into a Roman conception, still marked with those Hellenistic symbols, but here, as so often, re-presented as part of a Roman conception of the world. The geographical writers translated, co-opted, colonised and exerted imperial control over the description and conceptualisation of space. Just as centuriation was a geographic partitioning for administrative purposes with a colonialist outcome, so we can speak of the Roman imperial geographical writers as participating in the centuriation of geographical knowledge.¹⁶

The geographical narratives presented in these works reinforced the ability and authority of the Roman Empire to manipulate the physical, social and political landscape. Geographical “truth” could be manipulated by the selective presentation of historical events (Alexander’s campaigns), processes (Macedonian colonisation), and periods (the Assyrian Empire) and by the inclusion or omission of contemporary power structures and spheres of influence. Purcell argues that “the display of the power of the conqueror to grasp the landscape, human and physical, and change it, is what is essential to Roman

14 The relationship between imperialism and geography was discussed in Chapter 7. For modern research on imperial and colonial geographies in the field of cultural geography, see Clayton (2004). For the ideological character of systems of ordering of knowledge in a variety of imperial genres, see the papers collected in König and Whitmarsh (2007), and especially their introduction.

15 Moatti (2006).

16 On centuriation as display of imperial power of the landscape, Purcell (1990) 16.

imperialism.”¹⁷ This power to reshape the landscape is starkly evident in the *Expositio Totius Mundi*. Within the space delimited as Roman, the *Expositio* disconnects the cities of the empire from their local contexts, thus placing them only in relation to each other and the Roman administration. This creates a global context for the commercial imperial world that the *Expositio* constructs.

The concern with long distance trade routes discussed in Chapter 6 speaks to the importance the geographic writers placed on Mesopotamia as a site of inter-imperial connections. The manner in which each author presents networks of movement and contact is informative regarding that writer’s attitude towards the role of the region in a global Roman world and the role of the region in the truly global world beyond, but including, Rome. In every case, it is clear that geographical writers conceived of Mesopotamia as playing a central role in that truly global *inter*-imperial space, and that Mesopotamia’s role as a space within the Roman Empire was fundamentally linked to that broader view. As relations between Rome and the Sasanians became more frequently aggressive and entrenched into late antiquity, Mesopotamia’s role as a connective borderland between the two empires comprising many overlapping boundaries and networks only increased in significance. However, it also became more central to and integrated within the empire. Recall Strabo’s subtle obfuscation of Parthian control in the service of Augustan ideology compared to the firmness with which the author of the *Expositio* identifies the Roman space as *nostra terra*.

This book has sought to illuminate not just the process of writing geography as conceived and practised by Roman geographic writers, but the ways in which those writers understood the relationships between the Roman and Iranian Empires and the borderland itself. Many of these geographical representations of the borderland exhibit an inter-imperial scope that speaks to the concern of geographical thinkers within the Roman Empire with the boundaries between Roman and Iranian space, the relationship between Roman and Iranian power, and the negotiation of both within the borderland which lay between them. Bulliet has described the role that “edge” communities play in cultural change to the core.¹⁸ Peripheral contact zones produce cultural changes which propagate to central regions. The production and translation of geographic knowledge about the Mesopotamian Borderland for the Roman political class participated in the increased eastern focus of the late empire. Parker defined a borderland as a geographic space around or between political or cultural entities where circumstances or processes arising from the

17 Purcell (1990) 23.

18 Bulliet (2006).

interaction of boundaries create borders or frontiers.¹⁹ This was the case in the Mesopotamian Borderland *and* in the presentation of the space in the Roman imperial geographic sources. Those intersecting boundaries made the Mesopotamian Borderland a route which connected the Roman and Iranian worlds, a space between those two worlds, and an interface at which those two worlds came into contact and dialogue through frequent boundary crossings.

¹⁹ B.J. Parker (2006).

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Geographical Index

The geographical index includes geographical features, including those marked primarily by the peoples who inhabit them (e.g. the Skenitai). Geographical features including the name of the type of feature in English are alphabeticized according to their proper name (e.g. “Van, Lake”, not “Lake Van”). The Greek and Arabic definite article (*οί, al-*), the semitic letter ‘*ayn* (e.g. ‘*Arab*), and diacritical marks (e.g. *Ḥulwān*) are ignored for the purposes of alphabeticization. Maps are listed when the feature is marked on the map.

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